

The Buffoon

By Louis U. Wilkinson



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THE BUFFOON

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THE BUFFOON

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U
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CHAPTER I

IT seemed inevitable that all contacts with Edward Raynes should shake his cap and bells. He had in his brain a teasing imp of farce, an imp sometimes vaguely irritating to him. He approached the dim consciousness, as he took time and grew, that this "control" was something separate from himself, particularly from the self that lay low and sometimes made as though it might emerge. His pantaloons impulses and grotesque ribald stirs jerked him about on their strings, making him feel uncomfortably a mannikin now and then. The strings were fastened inside and wound round; they were ligaments disconcertingly animal and organic.

But Edward did not embarrass himself by dwelling on his really intimate concerns; he did not enter upon painful self-analysis. His existence was agreeable and superficial; he clipped and rolled the smooth soft grass of his superficies with a care that grew yearly more exquisite and more absorbing. He had an easy licence for such occupation, in the way of which stood no mocking hindrance. His belittling

farceur imp could not belittle what was small enough already, could not comically depreciate what laid a claim at once so moderate and so beyond possibility of challenge for what it was. Edward could comport his outward existence as sedulously as he chose without any apprehension from that burlesque leer.

He was, in fact, subject to the mastery in chief of certain eighteenth century minds, that mastery of fear of the personal indignities which invade us always along with the intense sensations that come of going far, whether in thought or in emotion. These mastered ones cling to a surface made as secure and as habitable as possible, while they make fools when they can of others in order to cover their own terror of the motley. Again, they will inoculate themselves with a prophylactic mild dilution of recognised absurdity, will cultivate certain whims and foibles to draw off ridicule that would elsewhere strike too deep. By an irony almost tragic these men end in being the most completely tricked by whatever cosmic spirit there is; themselves the buffoons who have lost most.

The smothered discomforts of Edward's soul came from the intermittent expression of its desire for salvation. As he grew older he developed wider reaches and more various appreciations, but he resisted unpeaceable readjustments and evaded reconstructions. He came to new experiences and took them in, but they had to be on terms with what was there already; they were not allowed to bring about

any searching or sifting change. The distant, occasional suggestion that they should, gave Edward what almost amounted to pain, what certainly disturbed his equanimity. At such times he would go out and buy a new tie, with especial care and judgment.

He was by nature active, both of mind and body, and he occupied himself thoroughly enough, though always within bounds, never rashly forgetful of the safe middle path. He read, he travelled, he looked at pictures, he heard music, he had to do with girls. He was often taken up with arrangements for his cottage in Sussex and his London rooms. He liked choosing wallpaper and carpets, chairs, sideboards, furniture of every kind: such exercise of taste ran most smoothly along his lines; he picked up a good many "nice things" in France, in Italy, in Belgium, and at certain English shops, specially discovered, in London and elsewhere. He spent, too, some energy in the cultivation of his palate, in the acquisition of a *flair* for the virtues of wines and chefs. Nor did he neglect his wardrobe; he took up time with his clothes and was successful with them.

Edward's balanced variety of well-toned interests conspired to prevent him from going intellectually or emotionally far, and so kept him safe. This was, in fact, what his interests were for, to bring the bearing-rein to play, to hold him off from any rush or plunge into self-committal. Every preoccupation, with him, became pleasant and mild, was reduced to

the level of an agreeable joke. He was so much in bond to his sense of humour that he felt lost when within reach of anything that he could not dig in the ribs. From this angle or that, on one excuse or the other, he would have his anticipated prod.

It was with this habitual air of humorous detachment that he approached art and letters. He enjoyed occasional reading and occasional pictures, but his enjoyment was always well within range of his habitual self. So much as he permitted to reach him of Watteau, Velasquez, and the very early Italian painters, gave him pleasure. Watteau especially he found attractive: the costumes of Watteau's people delighted him, and their attitudes. He went to Berlin and Dresden solely on account of Watteau; he cocked his eyebrow at intervals during the journey, he tempered his enthusiasm with raillery so as to be able to support it without wincing. As he regarded the *Fête Galante* an unusual thing happened. A notion of parody struck him, and he rebelled against his appointed rôle. "Damn it," he murmured, "this spoils my pleasure."

As a rule he saw nothing the burlesque of which he could resent: the idea of his burlesque went hand in hand with what he saw and was even pleurably affiliated with it. He appreciated æsthetically, within the bounds determined by this "humour" of his: he was like a man cherishing dependently an optical disease that clips the range of vision, and modifies so much vision as remains. He had this

same docked and smeared view of Velasquez and Botticelli, and no less of literary artists.

When Edward read he stood more notably aloof from any serious self-committal than ever. He looked through a telescope at his author, with the other eye significantly closed. In his way, he was a shrewd enough critic: he was not easily imposed upon by shallow talent, and although he kept genius at a distance he had a very keen relish for so much as he could safely accept of what genius gave him. Henry James suited him extremely well, especially in style. He gave Edward's brain the kind of movement that he found most acceptable, and indulged his amiable jocosity in exactly the right way. For Edward could be amiable and jocose at a little distance from this author, on very good terms with him all the while.

Edward amused himself more lazily with racy novels, sensation novels, and novels of adventure. Never with any of his authors did he become personally involved, not even with passionate poets like Shelley and Swinburne; he ignored on a bland instinct everything in them that could personally involve him: they inevitably had to let him off.

Modern propagandist writing Edward soon came to accept with the utmost *sang-froid*. It pleased him to think of the social system as a laughing-stock, he was quite content that it should be, but equally content that there seemed some prospect of these reformers having their fling. This gave him promise

of a new kind of entertainment. Meanwhile he "ragged" his Club acquaintances with Socialistic quips and sallies; but so happily and sportively that he kept his popularity along with an extension of his jester's licence.

He was interested in people. He had no friends, but he knew a good many men, and with all of them he played his game, trotting them to and fro in the light of his *opéra-bouffe* stage, where they suffered their appropriate conversions to his kind of figures of fun. His taste for more obvious clowning melted after he left Cambridge: he was less for action, and more for talk; but he still especially enjoyed outrageous shocks, preposterous juxtapositions, incredible claps and jangles,—all possible occasions for full-blown unpardonable laughter. Anything in the nature of a shameless projection, towards whatever quarter, made him well content.

Edward travelled in France; he was often in Paris. He went sometimes to Italy and to Spain. His impressions had to fall in and keep their place: it was necessary for him to feel safe with them, to make them yield his familiar enjoyment that did not go too far. Sometimes he travelled alone, but on the whole he preferred a companion, even at the cost of a play less free in the neat disposal of his hours. There were two men of his acquaintance, George Forrest and Theocrite Molesworth, ("Theocrite" struck Edward as delectable) whom he particularly

sought for his amusement. With women he was not occupied except in the way of the more elementary satisfactions and entertainments, of which he now and again very freely partook. Not that his amours were gross and bald; he discriminated and appreciated at leisure, he took in many nice little points, quite as usual. He held pretty balances between his blood and his perceptions. He had never been at all in love.

He always spent Christmas with his mother, a clergyman's widow, who lived at Westbeach. Sometimes he went to see her about Easter and Whitsuntide, or she to see him. These festivals of the Church seemed to be naturally reserved for exercises of filial piety. Westbeach depressed Edward, and his mother depressed him more than Westbeach. She was "devoted" to him, her only child, in the conventional maternal way: that is, she was not really self-sacrificing at all; simply animal and uncontrolled. In Edward's younger days, when there had not been much money, his mother had lived parsimoniously, with high sentimental satisfaction in doing so "for Edward's sake." Later, when Edward's godmother had left him a large sum, and family legacies came in, Mrs. Raynes continued her sparing ways: parsimony had become a habit; it gave her an occupation and a vice. In the spirit of drugging or tipping she would invest little sums at frequent intervals for her boy's advantage. Edward sometimes resented her use of him as a vehicle for

self-indulgence. He also resented her parsimony, because he was, in a different way, parsimonious himself.

In spite of, indeed because of his improved fortunes, Edward never threw money about. Like all well-to-do men he soon came to enjoy little economies. At Cambridge, and just afterwards, in London, when he was reading for the Bar, he had not economised at all; he was always in debt. He had too little money then to make economy interesting. Now that he was by comparison rich he prided himself on never spending without adequate return. Here was one of his permitted foibles. He suffered real chagrin when he thought he had been overcharged, in however trifling a degree. He gave reverent attention to unnecessary expenditures: he exercised scrupulosities about them. He liked exactness, and roundings-off. When he wanted to post a letter abroad and happened by some unusual oversight to have only penny stamps, he would go out of his way to a Post Office for a half-penny stamp, sooner than use three penny ones, or he would post the next day. In the same spirit he finished off the remains of his pieces of soap and kept watch over unused half sheets of notepaper. He never wrote letters when postcards would do. But none of his expensive pursuits gave him a pang; he never thought of money when he was about his pleasures. As he put it himself, he had no taste for petty extravagances.

CHAPTER II

EDWARD was standing, one bright July morning of his thirty-sixth year, before the looking-glass of his bedroom in Sussex, completing his toilet. It was about half-past nine.

Getting up in the morning was delightful to Edward. He took a cold bath, a luxury particularly well-suited to people who are both sanguine and sensuous. After his bath he dressed rapidly till his trousers were on, and then very slowly. In his shirt-sleeves he looked his best, and he enjoyed his looks. At this point he rolled his first cigarette of the day, from pure mild Virginian tobacco. No prepared Virginian cigarettes of the same freshness and flavour can be bought, as Edward had found out long ago. This maiden cigarette he rolled with exquisite nicety, and was pleased by every whiff of it. It occupied him almost exclusively. When it was lit he sat down opposite his looking-glass, to smoke and to survey himself.

He was still quite a young man in appearance. There is nothing like a regard for pleasure and a strictly humorous view of life, well supported by income, for keeping a man young. Edward had avoided all possible ageing complications of existence: far-reaching emotions, probing thought, mar-

riage, any experiences that might stir, he had avoided them all. He had taken resolute care of himself. His complexion was as fresh as ever — ruddy but not coarsened in the least. He had a rather small, neatly turned head, soft straight hair between brown and auburn, and a carefully kept moustache of a lighter tint. His lips were too thick and not firmly closed, so he was wise in wearing a moustache. His gay clear blue eyes were a distinct asset, especially in gallantries. His ears were small and nicely made; his chin, though not quite square, showed decision and had a masculine tone. He was a little over middle height, trim and well built. Taken altogether, he pleasantly caught the eye.

After smoking, Edward shaved, and when he had shaved he tended his moustache. On this particular morning he was blandly regarding the proximity of these operations. He had just thrown away the end of his cigarette and got up from his chair, when a knock sounded on his bedroom door. Edward's complacency was a shade ruffled. He moved to the door and gently turned the key. "Well?" he said suavely.

"Confound you!" exclaimed a voice outside. "Don't lock me out."

"What do you want, George?"

"I want to talk to you."

"Can't be done just now, dear boy."

"But hang it all," George Forrest's voice showed

irritation, "I've something particularly important to say."

"Yes, but I can't dress comfortably with anybody looking on."

"Rot."

There was a pause, then George observed rather plaintively: "You might as well let me in."

Edward was silent. George went away for a moment: coming back with a chair, he sat down outside the door.

"Why do you get up so beastly late?" he began. "You're wasting your life, that's what you're doing. Every man ought to be of some use in the world. You'd be far happier if you had an aim in life. Why don't you take up politics or municipal affairs or healthy sport? Think of the time you waste. It's perfectly awful. Think of the opportunities you have. Many men would give their eyes to have your opportunities. Think of the good you might do. And everything going to waste. It's criminal. While you're still a young man. It's really exasperating. Have you *no* ambitions? Are you *always* going to fool away your existence? Where is your conscience? 'Life is real, life is earnest.' Is any human being the better for your existence? Tell me that. Edward Raynes, I must rouse you if I can. I feel it my duty to do so. I must make the attempt. You have intelligence. Surely your intelligence wasn't given you to waste? You must see that. Think what a chance you had at the Bar.

You might have been a K.C. by now. Many a less able man has been a K.C. at your age. At this moment you might have been speaking in the Courts — making a forensic triumph. Your name in all the newspapers! Think of that. And what are you doing?" (He could hear Edward stropping his razor.) "Shaving. Shaving!" (His tone conveyed infinite disgust.) "Shaving at ten o'clock in the morning, and not yet had breakfast. You take half an hour or more to shave. I shave in five minutes. No man worth his salt should take longer than ten minutes to shave, especially when he has a moustache. I shave at seven thirty, sharp, every morning. That's the way to begin the day's work. Read Rudyard Kipling. Read Colonel Roosevelt's speeches. 'The strenuous life.' Splendid man, the Bishop of London. Prove your manhood. That's what we all have to do."

Edward, within, continued to shave. George left his chair, and walked the passage for awhile to cool his indignation. He was a lean dark wiry man, nearly ten years younger than Edward. He had approached as a neighbour soon after Edward had taken this Sussex cottage. George had never been happy about his friend, and recently had become convinced that it was his mission to wean him from a life of shameful ease; but it was the first time that he had made so direct an appeal. At last, he thought, the hour had come for a plain frank talk.

George was one of those people who, with limited

intellectual and æsthetic resources, have a mania for activity. It was the object of his life to satisfy this mania, and to infect other people with it. He ran any number of organizations in his neighbourhood,—the Boy Scouts, the Church Lads' Brigade, the Debating Society, the Society for Discouraging Drinking except at Mealtimes, two political Associations, and a Chess Club. He was always speaking at meetings. He prided himself above everything else on being an organiser, and secondly on being a good all-round useful man. Marriage would have taken the wind out of his numerous sails, and that was largely why he showed no disposition to marry.

Edward foresaw diverting vistas from the moment George fastened upon him. From the first he treated him scandalously, pushing him beyond every limit of usual endurance, teasing him shamelessly about his "good works," pelting his upright simple schoolboy soul with little pellets aimed just where they might most intimately smart and sting; provoking thus the absurdest starts, the jumps and jerks most worth a smile. He used George in this way for his entertainment, and refused to pay any fee for the show. When George began to be tedious or to get on his nerves, he got rid of him at once. Sometimes he slipped into the nearest Bar, calling out to the Secretary of the Society for Discouraging Drinking except at Mealtimes: "Come along! My turn to treat"—or he would pick up

some gay girl, with: "Ah, George, you introduced us, didn't you?"—or drive him away by a lewd gibe.

He had listened to the remarks made by George outside his bedroom door without allowing the rounded harmony of his existence to be in any way disturbed. George renewed the attack, he renewed it several times, taking intervals to think of fresh things to say, and of how to say them most effectively.

Edward proceeded with the completion of his toilet: he waxed his moustache, he washed his hands with the hot water left over from shaving, moderated by the tepid water from his hot bottle. It pleased Edward to put things to two purposes; it seemed to add a spice to life when he poured the water out of his bottle into his basin. He always used a hot bottle however warm the weather might be, and he never washed his hands when he took his cold bath: that would have distracted him. Finally everything was done and had fitted in delightfully. Edward loved things to fit in. When he could look back on his toilet as on a perfected and highly developed organism, planned and realised to admiration, then he opened the door. George was in the midst of a peroration.

". . . that indolence which is the deadliest of all corrosives, saps all that is worth calling manhood, and in the end destroys one, physically, mentally and morally."

"Good morning," said Edward, affably patting him as he rose hurriedly from the chair. George scowled. "Come along, dear one," Edward continued, "I want breakfast."

"Tell me,"—George spoke slowly and solemnly as they walked downstairs,—"you will at least think over what I have said, will you not?"

"I tell you what, George, if you go looking at little Norah in that wicked way as you pass my garden gate, they'll clap you into prison, that's what they'll do to you."

"Little Norah" was a girl of the village, a farmer's daughter. On Edward's mention of her she was at once embarrassingly present to George's mind. Her prettiness was of the rich Italian type: when she had just washed her dark hair,—she managed to wash it very often—it was really lustrous. She was a vivid sun-steeped thing, and promised a full bloom more vivid still. A Frenchman would have described her with his graphic "*fausse-maigre*." For she was slender and plump at the same time: her slimness was feminine, not boyish. She was not "*fruit vert*," yet she could give a tempting suggestion of immaturity while still more temptingly belying it a moment later. She had a provocative way of being both this and that in contrast: generous and lithe, developed and undeveloped, innocent and equivocal, dangerous and harmless, she piqued men, she made them uneasy and unsure of themselves. Most of the village boys fought shy of her: those

that did not she, with a light touch here and there, made unhappy. Edward had observed her in a detached way: she was disturbing to George, though he firmly believed she was nothing of the sort.

George had been staring at Edward in amazed horror. "How dare you, Raynes? This is a — a most scandalous and unwarrantable imputation. I never even saw Norah Weekes."

"Weekes? — Weekes? Is her name Weekes? But of course you must be right. Sportive little filly, George, what?" Edward walked into his dining-room.

"This is outrageous of you, Raynes. The girl is a mere child."

"Coming on sixteen, I believe. But gay and sprightly. Very apt, George, very apt."

"I am going. I refuse to be a party to such conversation. And the girl is eighteen — just eighteen."

"Ah, you know, George, you know. You notice these things. But why call her a mere child, then? Disingenuous, most disingenuous. Ah me, how time goes!"

Edward's servant Merrion came in with kidneys and bacon, and Edward seated himself at the table.

"Fruit, George?" Edward hospitably invited. "I sometimes begin breakfast with fruit. Have a banana?"

"I do not eat bananas at half past ten in the morning."

"Why not? And it's only a quarter past." Edward peeled his banana thoughtfully, with the same careful precision that he gave to the rolling of his cigarettes.

"It's men like you," George jerked the words at him, "who keep the world back. If all people of independent means led your kind of life, we should never get anywhere."

"You are interesting this morning"—Edward surveyed his peeled banana,—"but I never join in intelligent conversation till I've quite finished breakfast. Will you please ring the bell?"

George rang it under protest, and the man came back. Edward told him to take the kidneys out and keep them hot till he had finished his banana. "Canary bananas," he added, speaking to George. "All the other kinds are, oh such a mistake."

"Now if I were you," he went on, after Merrion had gone, "I'd try one of those kidneys when they come back. With a glass of ale. Delicious. Just the thing for the middle of your morning."

"You know I never drink between meals."

"But I'm offering you a meal, George. A beautiful meal."

"It's not a *regular* meal."

Edward went on with his banana, and as he was consuming the last mouthful the servant reappeared with the kidneys. He had learnt to time all his master's movements with a lovely exactness. The silver cover slid over from the dish, and Edward helped

himself with all the concentration of the artist. George watched him with pained attention. When Edward began to eat, the other shuffled his feet uneasily, took a deep breath, and sat down, withdrawing his chair from the table in a marked and conscientious way. Edward looked up at him quizzically. He was happy. The kidneys were perfect.

George was not happy. He was the subject of what Gibbon refers to as an "intestine dissension." "His state of man, like to a little kingdom, suffered then the nature of an insurrection." He wanted a kidney. The cover of the dish had been rolled back again, so that the remaining kidneys might not cool too much in case Edward decided upon a second helping, but the fragrance from Edward's plate was alluring, provocative almost beyond bounds. Edward held up his laden fork, and the little cloud of steam that puffed away from it seemed to be immediately caught and wafted towards George by some mocking sprite, set upon maddening his tortured nostrils. And all the while Edward was enjoying those kidneys, — appreciating every subtlety of them in silence, with the studied *flair* of the gourmet who understands the restraint and eclecticism proper to his profession. George had breakfasted early and had walked some miles. This was too much. He capitulated suddenly.

"After all," he said; then he paused. He cleared his throat so as to arrest the flow of his shame.

"After all — er — I think I will perhaps take a little kidney."

"Capital. Would you ring the bell again?"

George, after ringing, sat down and stared at the tablecloth. Humiliation was upon him. He was finding it impossible to keep up his righteous indignation against Edward. This gave him a sense of moral collapse. He was uncomfortable. And, to make it worse, Edward had not argued with him. What George had looked for was a defence from Edward; a defence that he would with some labour, but in the end triumphantly, break down. He had imagined that towards the end of the morning he would return as a runner from his course, his spiritual muscles strained, but strained to some purpose. As it was, he had never felt less like a moral athlete in his life. It was distressing.

"A hot plate and ale in a jug." Edward gave the order.

The words seemed to George a symbol of his fall. "A hot plate and ale in a jug." He saw the shameful climax of his visit. "No, no, not ale," he stammered feebly, but he knew that it was all inevitable now. "A hot plate and ale in a jug." The words beat gently, insistently, against the half-opened doors of his will, and had their way. Every fibre in him grew lax and more lax. He realised obscurely, as he looked furtively up now and again to Edward, that Edward might, in his way, be called a success.

George was baffled. He could not consent to what

he felt. His code protested, his moral formulæ bridled, those formulæ that jerked his world on the stilts of "ought" and "must." None the less a moment's unphrased suspicion came that life might be less simple than he thought: his vague impression of a certain completeness and distinction in Edward made his enjoyment of the kidneys and ale a less immoral thing.

"Eat first, George. Postpone the ale. You will find that better in the end. Yes."

The last word, sibilant, gentle, decisive, gave a cachet to Edward's exhortation. When he said "Yes" in that way at the end, after a slight pause, it was like the placing of a soft velvet paw on the wrist.

Edward lingered, buttering bits of dry toast till George's ale was finished. He did not like to eat honey when some one else was drinking ale. That would have jarred. When George had done, Edward had the glass and jug removed. Then he took honey, with brown bread. George felt embarrassed, but defiant. He fumbled at his cigarette case, but Edward would not let him smoke.

"Wait a few minutes, George," he said. "I must eat honey first. You will enjoy your cigarette all the more later on. Sit in an armchair and read something."

George obeyed. Edward left the room as soon as his breakfast was over; he left so quietly and

rapidly that the other was hardly aware of his departure.

“ Well, I’m hanged ! ” George ejaculated, as the door shut. This was so entirely unlike anything that he himself would have done.

CHAPTER III

THAT afternoon Edward drove to the station in his little pony-cart to meet a man who was coming down from London to pay him a visit. This Reggie Tryers was a young architect, whom Edward had met through Molesworth. He was a restless person, and, like George, a talker. Such men seemed naturally drawn to Edward; they circled about him like flies. Tryers was, however, only superficially like George Forrest. George buzzed a great deal, but never stung: Tryers was an insect with a poisonous tail. George spun busily round and round without real intent: Tryers made swift direct flights from point to point, his little brain urgently motive all the while. Tryers' intensity was narrow, morbid, dangerous; he had a hectic spirit. George's energy was expansive and physical and harmless; his spiritual temperature was inevitably normal. With George you knew exactly where you were; he was always simply George: "dear George," as Edward liked to call him. Tryers was never "dear Reggie."

Edward found Tryers the more interesting of the two. He had asked him down now for a few days because the architect had written that he was in "a state of great mental turmoil," and required Ed-

ward's advice. Edward was not sure if it was his advice or a little holiday that Tryers wanted, but he reflected that if the mental turmoil existed it might be amusing, and that if it didn't there would be no harm in giving Tryers a week-end in the country. So Tryers arrived that afternoon, very spotless, very neat, very agile, preternaturally alert. He advanced at a brisk pace along the platform, carrying a small shiny brown bag as though it were a weapon of attack.

"Well, Raynes? Got the pony-cart? Or shall I have this bag sent up? Lovely day for a walk. By Jove, I envy you here. If you knew how I've been dying to get out of London. Simply dying." (There was something barbed about Tryers' 'i' sounds.) "Oh, you have the cart. All right. This is my brother-in-law, Jack Welsh. He lectures, you know. You've met him, haven't you?"

Tryers indicated in his rear a turgid-faced man of about thirty. Welsh gave a sprawled effect. He was dressed in what looked like cast-off clothing. His coat and waistcoat, dark blue, were stained and spotted; some buttons were undone, others were missing. His trousers, equally negligent, were of a light grey, and quite filthy. He carried a bag in one hand, and a suitcase in the other.

"My friend!" cried Jack Welsh, as Tryers was introducing him, "my friend, I've left my coat in the train!"

He dropped his luggage, and dashed for the com-

partment, reappearing with a heavy overcoat which he at once put on, buttoning it tightly. The sun was hot, but Edward approved. That enveloping garment would save trouble with the police. Welsh ejaculated "Ah — ah —" as he shook hands.

"I thought you and Welsh ought to meet," explained Tryers. "He is quite one of our circle. You can put him up, can't you? He eats nothing but eggs and bread-and-milk. We can sleep together," he added nonchalantly.

Edward turned to Welsh.

"I'm delighted," he said gravely. "I think our friend here"—he indicated Tryers—"will be fairly well looked after at the Inn."

Welsh was enchanted. "Master of the situation!" he shouted. "Master of the situation! Reggie, you're foiled for once." He rubbed his hands violently. A girl broke into hysterical laughter. She was a particularly ugly girl, and she brayed like a donkey.

The three men left the platform, Welsh raising his hat with grave courtesy to the girl who had brayed at him. He accepted her demonstration as a tribute. His salute convulsed her. The hat was by force of contrast the most striking point in Welsh's attire. It was a quite new straw hat, some sizes too small for him.

Tryers was seriously put out. Edward guessed that he had planned this encounter for the discomfiture of Welsh, that he had meant Welsh to be a

laughingstock. Tryers' antagonism to his brother-in-law was easily detected. It was an antagonism to which Welsh's complete indifference and self-absorption gave a special venom. "Venomous" really was the word for certain rapid glances that Edward intercepted. He decided that he would be further entertained.

"I say, Tryers," he remarked, as he paid the boy who was looking after his pony, "you might go over to the bookstall and get me the 'Pink 'Un,' will you?"

As Tryers went, Edward got into the driver's seat. "Mount, Mr. Welsh," he said. "Mount at once."

Unfortunately it was impossible for Welsh to mount, or indeed to do anything demanding common skill, at once. He regarded the pony-cart with a timidity approaching terror.

"Quick, quick," urged Edward, with a touch of impatience.

Welsh grimaced, shooting out his lips and contorting his features. He waved his arms and spread his hands, holding them with a peculiar stiffness, as though they were made without joints. With manifest effort he placed one foot on the step, tried to balance himself, and then with a wilder wave of his arms collapsed on the road. He rose with difficulty, not attempting to brush the dust, and again approached the step. This time he entangled his overcoat in the wheel; he was seized by panic, and broke away with violent jerks.

"No!" he gasped. "No. It is too much for me. I can't."

Edward was fully occupied with keeping the pony in hand. "You really must get in," he gently commanded.

Welsh, with the expression of one conveyed to torture, put his foot on a spoke of the wheel, jerked his body towards Edward, and fell on him with feet in air. As Edward grasped him round the waist he wriggled distractedly into his seat. Tryers appeared with the pink paper, and Edward let the pony go.

"You'll follow after, Tryers, won't you?" he called.

Tryers dropped the paper and ran, but he could not overtake them. Neither Edward nor Welsh looked back. Edward knew that his companion's heaving hunched shoulders would be visible to Tryers till the turn of the road. He could imagine Tryers' abounding hatred of that derisive back.

"Capital!" Welsh hugged himself. "Nothing could please me better. What a situation! A master! You are indeed! You are a master! You understood me at once. I have an inordinate appetite for situations of any kind, humorous or melodramatic or sentimental. Oh, did Reggie tell you? We have just come from an elopement — an elopement!" Welsh gave the word a peculiarly succulent flavour; Edward was queerly reminded of 'cantaloupe,' so sweet and fruity was the intonation. "My

brother Bertie. The bride's parents — dead against it. What could be more exciting? He and the girl — a frail exquisite creature, slender as a peeled willow wand, — they were married in Kensington, and then where do you think we all went? Where? Where? To a tavern by the river — at Wapping Old Stairs! Wapping Old Stairs! Think of it! Wapping Old Stairs! ”

“ Please be careful to keep your seat,” Edward interposed. “ My pony is a bit restive.”

He had to repeat the injunction. Welsh swayed and rocked from side to side, backwards and forwards, rubbing his hands and beating with his feet, completely disregarding the objective facts of his position.

Edward decided that it was not a question of affectation. Welsh was not one of those people who pose as *naifs*: they never went so far as to risk physical danger. No, Welsh was an egoist who acted as was natural to him, and had a curious obliquity preventing him from noticing the effect he produced on others, or from copying usual conduct. There was evidently little co-ordination between his body and his mind. He could not manage his body; probably it had never occurred to him to manage it. Edward tabulated these speculations against further observation. He was rapidly getting reconciled to the idea of Welsh, he felt even attracted to him.

“ What a party we had! ” Edward caught up with the train of Welsh's narrative. “ What a party!

Willie O'Flaherty — the rarest spirit of the age — an amazing blend of Panurge and Charles Lamb — oh, you must meet Willie O'Flaherty, really you must — Tom Fielding, the most irreconcilable, the most imperturbable, of all individualists — my friend the Catholic, the subtlest and corruptest of theologians — my cousin Theodore who is a hermit and wise with the wisdom of all the mystics of all the ages — my little brother Lulu — a darling boy with bright curly hair and amorous lips — the Catholic liked him — his friend the Archangel, a wicked youth who was expelled from Oxford for celebrating the Black Mass — a beautiful youth and *utterly* unscrupulous — an old Polish poet, a Jew, in filthy rags — a colossal genius — and, of course, Reggie."

"Look out. We're going round a rather sharp corner."

"I tried to persuade Eunice Dinwiddie to come too. A wonderful girl — an American; the most beautiful and distinguished creature. I wish I could have got her. Oh, Eunice is really surprising, she —"

"Eunice," said Edward meditatively. "Eunice?" He was impressed by the name. It seemed significant.

"Oh, and one of our wedding guests was a prostitute, — a real prostitute. Think of that! 'Prostitute' is such a beautiful word; I'm always bringing it into my lectures. I arranged everything, of

course. I even ordered the champagne. Sweet champagne."

"What!" cried Edward, turning with a look of horror.

"Very sweet. I like it very sweet."

"Creaming Sillery," murmured Edward with a groan.

"Sillery! How lovely and loose and blurred that sounds! I hope it was Sillery. I forget. However, they were all drunk. We drank to Spain — the first time Spain has been toasted in England since the reign of Bloody Mary! The Catholic was very sick. He leaned over the parapet and was sick into the river, while the Archangel discoursed to him about the vices of priests. What a scene! He was quite ill afterwards. He had to go to bed."

"I don't wonder."

"But Ethelle — the prostitute — I wish you could have seen Ethelle. I'd bought her a coloured silk dress and a big hat with feathers and cherries. She was enchanted! I transformed her, I really did. Oh, you must meet Ethelle. I discovered her, I found her in a tavern, — the lowest of all taverns. Off the Vauxhall Bridge Road. She was battered and dirty: soiled — she was soiled. Reduced to the very last stage; consumptive, too. I am always drawn to the consumptive type. There she was, jeering and gibing among the riff-raff, — a derelict, a debris, a litter! I didn't speak to her then. I went away:

I lost her. But I came back, and — isn't it amazing? — I found her — yes, I found her! And I changed her from a sordid pathetic drab to a glittering courtesan! But fancy finding a girl in London. It was Fate; no doubt of it, it was Fate."

"Where did you find her?"

"Oh, quite near the same tavern. In the street. She was just walking up and down. Up and down."

"Her beat, evidently. What have you done with her now?"

"I sent her down to Liverpool. I knew old Tom would look after her. He lives there, you know, — Tom Fielding. I must go and see how she's getting on. Come with me. We'll go together. What an adventure! Ethelle is really beautiful, too. Yes," he went on thoughtfully, "quite a different type of beauty from Gertrude's. I am with Ethelle: then I go back, I go back to Gertrude. I pass from Ethelle's beauty to Gertrude's beauty."

"Who is Gertrude?"

"My wife."

Edward jumped. Welsh was incredible. No other man could have said that without being a cad, but Welsh was not a cad. He was in fact immune from caddishness. It was strange.

"How well you can deal with things, Mr. Raynes!" Welsh had abruptly broken off his æsthetic reminiscences. "Upon my word I admire you. I admire you!"

His tone was almost servile. Edward suspected

in him a mania for placating people. Was it that Welsh felt unable to "deal with" them in any other way? Edward looked at him sharply and wished he would not keep his mouth open so very wide.

"What is your cult?" Welsh demanded after a pause.

Edward recognised the language of what Tryers had referred to as "the circle." "I am quite normal," he replied.

"Ah —" Welsh opened his mouth more widely still. "Ah, that scoundrel Reggie! From a few little hints he let fall, I — well, you must meet Tom Fielding. Yes, it would be excellent for you two to encounter. We must arrange it."

"I am often in Liverpool."

"We are all of us often in Liverpool. Of course. I should have known. Good,—very good." Welsh pronounced these last words as though he were making advances to a dog who might snap if it weren't humoured.

They drove on in silence until Welsh began to expatiate on the beauties of the Sussex downs and woods.

"This country pleases me," he concluded. "And when there is sun! I should like to be always in the sun. I can be perfectly happy then. At other times I have inhibitions — you understand me, Mr. Raynes? — *taboos* — of the very strangest kinds. I am not allowed to do this or that; I am held back. A whimsical tyranny. The sun frees me. The sun

or desire. Yes, I am at the perpetual mercy of a Demogorgon. But really you know at bottom I am astonishingly, incredibly proud."

"Your nerves are probably a bit wrong. You mustn't eat nothing but bread-and-milk and eggs when you're with me. I'll give you underdone steak and Burgundy."

"But wine gives me appalling dyspepsia, and I can't eat meat. The idea of butchering animals in those slaughter-houses is horrible to me. If I could kill them myself I might eat them. I can sometimes eat a chicken if I can imagine that I have killed it."

"I'll have a chicken brought in alive, and you shall wring its neck."

"Good God!" Welsh gave a leap. "I couldn't do that."

"All right. You can imagine you have wrung its neck then. And perhaps you'd better take claret. I believe I've got a claret that won't give you dyspepsia."

"Oh, you keep good wine. I'm rather sorry. I never get on with connoisseurs or clubmen or people of that sort. None of my friends know anything about wine."

"That's probably why wine always gives you dyspepsia."

They had reached Edward's cottage. Welsh broke out into ecstasies over the garden. "Geraniums!" he exclaimed. "My favourite of all flowers! Geraniums. How beautiful they are! Gera-

niums! And those hollyhocks and pansies! Mr. Raynes, I envy you. You know how to live, indeed you do."

Edward was too much taken up with the prospect of getting Welsh safely out of the pony-cart to pay much heed to these eulogistic cries. "Yes, a pleasant little garden," he said, and before he had time to stop him, Welsh was scrambling forth as though he were climbing down a cliff. Edward kept a tight hand on the reins while his guest completed the descent by alighting heavily on both feet at once.

CHAPTER IV

“**I** WONDER when Reggie will be here,” said Welsh, as Edward took him upstairs. “Poor Reggie! oh, poor Reggie!” He laughed silently.

“Tell me what you think of Tryers.”

“He tries to interfere with my comfort,” Welsh replied. “He tries as hard as he can. Whenever we meet he begins talking about my vices. Well, I don’t object to that. We none of us object to that. He snaps down at me like a steel spring — he *is* a steel spring. My dear Mr. Raynes, what a beautiful room!” Welsh pronounced the adjective with inordinate stress on the first syllable. “*Beautiful!* And I can see all your garden. This is really exciting. And Reggie at the Inn! You are a master, you are indeed. Well!”

He sat down on the floor by the window. Edward took a chair opposite him.

“Ah yes — Reggie —” Welsh continued, “I let him talk — I listen to these interesting disquisitions on my character. But then he gets angry because I don’t get angry, his voice gets shriller and shriller. I seem to have a peculiarly irritating effect upon him. He is always asking me why I do this and that. As

if I knew. He is always telling me that I am extravagantly selfish. Once after he had been staying with us, we were walking to the station from my house — it's about three miles — and he scolded me the whole time about my being selfish. He gave me his bag to carry, so that he might be freer to emphasise his points by gesture. I carried his bag for two and a half miles, and he was talking about the beauty of altruism all the time."

"He amuses you then?"

"Oh, he amuses me, but he doesn't like amusing me at all. As a matter of fact," Welsh added gravely and confidentially, "he hates me. His spleen against me is terrific. That's why I really think there is some distinction about Reggie; he can feel so ferociously. I've seen him literally consumed with hatred: he seemed to shrivel. What intensity!"

"What kind of things does he say to you?"

"He says that my existence makes him believe in the reality of a Spirit of Evil. Sometimes he says that it convinces him that there is no God — or that there must be a God. I forget which. He is always saying things like that. Yes, he certainly hates me. I have treated his sister badly, I know, but he always encouraged me — said she wouldn't mind, it was what she expected, and that domestic virtues were absurd, and that women had no souls, — that kind of thing. I'm married to his sister, you know," he added.

"Do you always do what Tryers encourages you to do?"

"Nearly always. I'm like that. I can't stand holding out. That kind of active discomfort is intolerable."

"I should have thought that you gave yourself — if I may say so — an extremely uncomfortable kind of life."

"Good Lord! I'm devoted to my comfort. I'm quite shameless about it."

"Well done. I only meant — if I may be so free — but isn't it uncomfortable not to know how to get in and out of a pony-cart?"

Welsh opened his eyes. "Oh, I can't ever do things of that sort. It's a perpetual miracle to me that other people can. Existence at every turn seems to demand extraordinary skill on the part of human beings — skill in putting on clothes, skill in taking them off, skill in going on a journey, in eating one's food, even. It amazes me, the skill of my fellow-creatures."

"It is their lack of skill that amazes me," Edward rejoined feelingly. "Most people do everything amateurishly. They manage all these things you speak of in a raw, imperfect way — eating, dressing, and going about. No art, no feeling — none of the right kind of pleasure in what they do. I think on the whole I prefer your way to theirs. They do what is just necessary, in their gross usual way. You give it up altogether."

Welsh prised his body from the floor.

"That's it!" he cried. "That's it! Quite right! quite right! You are an artist. I knew it — I was sure of it! I'm not an artist — I never could be. Poetry, romance, rhetoric — yes — but art is beyond me. I sit at your feet."

He went to his bag and opened it. It flew asunder, and as Welsh held it sideways, the contents shot out on the floor. A collar-stud rolled swiftly to a corner under the bed. There were half a dozen books, two or three crumpled-up woollen shirts, very thick, several pairs of terrific worsted socks, and a dilapidated pair of white flannel trousers, with a large tear through which protruded a toothbrush. A pocket-comb was stuck between the leaves of one book, a shaving-brush between the leaves of another. Edward's view was tormented by one perfectly horrible boot, dirty, with a hideous broad toe, and brass hooks which stood out straight from the "uppers."

Welsh returned to his seat on the floor, abandoning the mess vomited by his bag. He looked dismayed by the prospect of coping with it.

"You see," he went on, "Reggie brought me down here so that I might be humiliated. He thought to himself: 'Now I'll show you what a grotesque creature you really are — now I'll have my revenge. You shall see the kind of figure you cut before a man of the world.' He's always telling me that any really civilised person would find me impossible — any civilised *man*, he says. Women,

of course, don't count. You represent for Reggie the very highest point of the cultivated life. Your manners are the finest, your taste the most exquisite, your breeding the most perfect."

"I'm afraid he doesn't think so now."

"Oh yes, he does. I'm sure he does. He'd forgive you anything. All his rancour will be for me. He would never hate you. You can deal with the world, you have money, you have position."

"I didn't know I had any position."

"Reggie thinks so. It's what we call a position. Anyhow, Reggie is tremendously proud of you. He is always saying that you would put me to shame. I am a boor, he says, and only fit for the company of boors. He expected to have some of the happiest days of his life down here, with you and me. Poor Reggie! But he'll never forgive me. If only he could whip me and stand me in the corner! He might recover then."

"Let's go down and have some tea," said Edward.

CHAPTER V

TRYERS returned as they were finishing their second cups. He had evidently been walking at a tremendous rate. His face was shining and his collar was limp. Edward offered him tea.

Tryers struck a match vigorously. "No tea for me," he said as he lit his cigarette. "I am not in the mood for tea. And what are *you* thinking of?" He turned fiercely to Welsh, who was regarding him with interest.

"Your nose," replied Welsh, simply.

Tryers was speechless. His nose was long and pointed. It looked particularly protrusive when he was hot.

"Well — I —" he stammered. "You are simply disgusting, Jack."

"Come, come," Edward intercepted, "you asked him. If you won't take tea, we might all go for a walk. My friend George Forrest will join us. He said he'd be round at a quarter past five. An admirable man. To know him is to love him. He reminds me of you in some ways, Tryers." Tryers looked suspicious. "He has wonderful energy and a great deal of conscience."

"Yes, Reggie," Welsh put in, "I always said you had conscience. The Cardinal Newman element in your face will triumph, my friend."

"You'll probably meet George again at breakfast to-morrow. An aunt of his is down here staying at the Inn, and to-morrow he's breakfasting with her. Do remember to tell the aunt to order kidneys. George is extremely fond of kidneys. Grilled, of course. Tryers, you'll really like George. He is an important person here. He is just like the Bishop of London. He has a wonderful way with young people. You remember that pretty little girl you admired last time you were here — Norah Weekes? He knows her quite well. He'll introduce you."

Tryers' eyes glistened, and Welsh began to listen attentively.

"You might do worse, you know, than breakfast with George. Yes, he has great influence here, great influence. His cousin — I think it was his cousin — married a man whose uncle by marriage is — or was — a lord. A useful man, George. But shall we go?"

They met George Forrest just outside the garden gate. He was punctual to the moment, as Edward had calculated. Tryers showed a disposition to attach himself exclusively to Edward, and they soon fell behind the other two.

"Really, Tryers," Edward meditatively regarded Welsh's back — "you ought to do something for your brother-in-law. You ought to take him in

hand. Don't you think he lets himself in for a quite unnecessary amount of agitation and discomfort?"

"He likes it," Tryers retorted. "I'm convinced that he likes being a fool. It's simply a pose —"

"I doubt it. It's a queer kind of laziness, that's what it is."

"Yes, of course it's laziness — sheer laziness." Tryers spoke rapidly. "It's exasperating, how lazy he is. He could easily write — he could make a name for himself, if he only tried. But he won't. He has ideas, of a sort — a kind of imagination. But it's too much trouble to put pen to paper. Oh, you wouldn't have much patience with him, I can tell you, if you saw as much of him as I do."

"Has he written anything at all?"

"Nothing but stray poems and a few chapters of a disgraceful novel."

"Oh, I must encourage him to finish that."

"If he ever gets it published, it will break his mother's heart — yes, that I know." Tryers' syllables reminded Edward of the teeth of a saw. "But he won't finish it. His laziness is incurable."

"You really must cultivate George Forrest. You would agree with him entirely. He hates laziness just as much as you do. Personally I don't see why Welsh shouldn't be lazy if he likes, but I'm sorry he gets so little out of it."

"He's happy," said Tryers aggressively.

"Evidently that doesn't please you."

"No, it does not please me." Tryers was lashed

to passion. "I tell you, Raynes, his kind of happiness is a curse — it's a curse to him and a curse to every one who meets him. He's a living blight! If you knew what I've suffered from that man! If there's a soul alive who can bring up all that's evil in me, it's Jack Welsh. He kills — yes, kills — at once and without mercy — everything that's good and fine. He's corrosive. — When I'm with him my soul is simply eaten away — eaten away!"

"Why be with him, then?" Edward spoke lightly, but he was really rather attracted by Tryers' savage intensity. After all, the man was more distinguished than George.

Tryers slashed vehemently at a flower with his stick.

"I must think of my sister," he replied. "I can't leave her alone to Welsh. His cruelty is appalling — you can't conceive it — not ordinary cruelty. He tortures the soul. Everything with him is in the brain. Nothing you can take hold of. That's why he maddens me. He suggests to me the most abominable vices — he doesn't act them himself, he can only enjoy them by getting other people to act them. That's his pleasure — the devil!"

"Very interesting. Do you think he would suggest them to me?"

Tryers halted suddenly. He fronted his companion.

"Don't be frivolous about this, Raynes, I implore you. There are times when the Oxford manner —"

"I was at Cambridge."

"I'm in earnest, I can tell you — deadly earnest — about Welsh. He has no soul, and his mission is to rob other people of theirs."

"Like the fox without a tail?"

Tryers turned impatiently, and started off at a rapid pace to catch up with the others. Edward clutched at his coat-tails.

"My dear fellow," he remonstrated, "you won't save your soul by walking ten miles an hour. Go on talking to me. What you say interests me."

Tryers slowed down, but was silent. Edward had often regretted his lack of humour. The comic papers gave Tryers his ideas of what was funny. In his lighter moods he was simply intolerable; his conversation suggested a facetious scrap-book.

"You said something in your letter about mental turmoil," Edward remarked after awhile. "I rather want to hear about that."

"You wish to ridicule me, Raynes."

"Nothing of the kind. I was wondering if you had brought your brother-in-law as a sort of object-lesson."

"Not altogether. I wanted to know how you would take him, I wanted you to advise me in dealing with him."

"I shouldn't have thought Welsh was the kind of man to influence you much."

"I thought that at first. That's just why he's so dangerous, because he seems such a fool. But he

can talk, he can work in your mind. I think he has a kind of hypnotic power — hidden away. I tell you I feel that I have him in my blood sometimes — I tell you how it is," Tryers went on excitedly. "His own body won't answer to his horrible brain — you've seen for yourself that he has no command of his body — and his body is diseased. Do you know," Tryers spoke indignantly, "he has practically no stomach at all?"

"Good Lord, how uncomfortable! I can forgive Welsh anything now. No soul and hardly any stomach!"

Tryers was too much wrought to take any notice.

"You see, Raynes, how it is. It's a ghastly business, all this. He gets me — gets me slowly — in his way — and then he shoots his poison. I'm the soobject."

Edward knew that Tryers was thoroughly roused, because he had begun to talk with a North-country accent. That emphatic broadening of the vowels reinforced his speech. Tryers came of good Norman yeoman stock; he showed his origin in the hard narrow quality of his tenacity, in that energy of his that drove straight furrows; and in the vigour of his frame.

"I'm the soobject," he repeated. "He's got the physical force in me that he laacks, and the will for aaction. He can't go further than imaagine evil — he's what they call a Cerebralist. My God!" he broke out, "I think he does little but imaagine evil

all day long! And he's given me a diseased mind in a healthy body, thaats what he's done. Thaats what he's always wanted to do, and meant to do, daamm him!"

"At any rate," said Edward gently, "I hope you get some enjoyment out of your wickedness."

"I don't. No, not real enjoyment. I'm horribly disturbed, I'm in a fever, when I give myself to evil. Of course I know, Raynes, that you'll say good and evil have no real existence, that our lines between them are artificial and foolish. Nietzsche and all that." Tryers was calmer now. "But I tell you that I am sure of the reality of evil — this last year has made me sure of it. Not believe in evil! Man, I tell you that Alexander might as well have not believed in the existence of the Persians! If you fight a thing, you know it's real. And when I lose in the fight I'm miserable, and when I win I'm restless and discontented — the prey of desire. All his lust in my veins — and then he comes in with his covert taunts: 'Oh, my friend, well done! I admire your persistence, I really do.' And I see it's all a farce to him. I'm in it for his amusement." Tryers gritted his teeth.

"Rather like Jekyll and Hyde. You quite thrill me."

"It's not like Jekyll and Hyde. It's much worse. I wouldn't mind if this evil were part of my own nature. It isn't — it's not in me at ali. But I'm going to get out of it. I've made up my mind."

"Good. By the bye, I'm not so sure that you should have met George Forrest, after all. He might introduce you to Norah Weekes. I couldn't be responsible for handing over that poor child to this demon of Welsh's, could I now?"

Tryers' face changed. "Don't, Raynes — don't, I entreat you. I shouldn't have brought Welsh here if I'd remembered that girl. He mustn't be allowed to see her — to *see* her, mind. He won't touch her, he won't even talk to her — but he'll think, he'll look and *think*. I know it sounds absurd, but that's how he does harm. It isn't absurd really. I was talking to an Indian the other day, and he quite understood it. Said that infinite harm might be done by looks and thoughts. But you torment me when you talk of Norah. I don't think I ought to have come myself, with her here. She stirs up all those awful temptations —"

Edward laughed.

"My dear man, why be so serious about it? Forgive me if I seem Oxonian, but it really is a mistake sometimes, this serious point of view."

"Lust is always serious."

"Perhaps, but there should be a laugh somewhere, and it's up to us to see that the laugh is on our side. Norah is simply a commonplace, pretty young creature, very conscious of her sex attraction, ready enough for flirtations, but sensible enough to keep herself in hand. That's all there is in it, and all there ever will be. If you want to amuse yourself

with the girl, go ahead. She won't be troubled by any mental turmoil. But I shall ask you to be a little discreet. I'm here a good deal, you know, and gossip is sometimes a nuisance. It's a small place. We're not in Liverpool."

"Ah, Raynes, that's like you." Tryers' face had grown tense while Edward was speaking. "Lust isn't really a vice of yours, I've always said that. A man who isn't a drunkard can enjoy his glass and be none the worse. But I'm not like that. Even if I didn't harm Norah, she would harm me. But the evil in me would touch her, I know it would," he concluded fiercely.

"Don't flatter yourself. I bet you a sovereign to half a crown that nothing you could do would hurt Norah in the least. Go on and try."

Tryers did not answer at once. Then very decisively he said: "I won't."

"No, I won't. This is the time to begin the struggle. I should have begun — really begun — before. I've been weak — it's that man has made me weak. When I look back, I see how he started — how he worked it all out —"

"I can't believe that Welsh would ever work anything out."

"Oh yes, he did. He undermined my Faith — that was his first step. He didn't do it himself. That would have been too much trouble, and he knows he can't argue. He introduced me to an Oxford man —"

"Oh, these Oxford men!"

"—the most devastating materialist I've ever met." Tryers shuddered. "Then he would talk himself about the free happy Pagan life — 'freed from all Christian hopes and fears'; as his friend O'Flaherty put it. He knew my passions were strong. He knew that it was only my religion — my belief in immortality — that saved me from them. He knew that the one sure way to ruin me was to take away my Faith and let my passions have full swing."

"He took a flattering interest in you, at any rate."

"Flattering! It was the kind of game that amused him.— And then when I yielded, when I went his way, 'Are you so sure,' he'd say, 'that this free Pagan life is the best after all? Won't you be sorry in the end? Aren't you a little sorry even now? Don't you sometimes look back with a certain regret?' Curse him! He wouldn't let me enjoy even that life, though it was he who had seduced me!"

"Yes — that was unkind. But tell me what are you going to do about it?"

"That's where I want your help. I felt I must tell you, I must get you on my side. I've got to go through an awful ordeal, Raynes, and the hardest thing will be the taunts and laughter of my friends." A couple of flies, amorously interlocked, fell on Tryers' nose, as though they too intended to join the ranks of the mockers. "That's my weak point."

Tryers flicked angrily. "I'm sensitive to ridicule. I beg of you, Raynes, don't make it any harder for me to win back my Faith. I have the will to believe, to believe again. I mean to! Don't you stand in my way."

Edward looked at him. He appeared to be perfectly sincere. He had spoken with concentrated determination, quietly, and with a certain dignity. Edward reserved judgment.

"Of course I won't stand in your way," he replied. "You know what I think. So far as I can make out, what a man happens to believe doesn't change him in the least. You'll be just the same, with faith or without. When I came here first George Forrest was a staunch Tory. Now he's a vigorous Radical. But he's precisely the same George Forrest."

"Oh — politics! That's quite another thing. Religious belief will make all the difference to me."

"I hope it will take well. But let us catch them up. Let us approach this seducer of human souls."

CHAPTER VI

“**N**OW then,” said Welsh, after a pause, twisting and screwing his absurd straw hat on his head, “now then, Mr. Raynes,” he said hopefully, “let us talk about something interesting.”

This remark made Tryers restive. “We ought to turn now, oughtn’t we?” he suggested, with evident ill-humour.

“Certainly,” Edward replied, “we will turn a little later on. And we will talk,—if possible about something interesting, to please Mr. Welsh.”

Tryers brightened. This sounded like sarcasm. But then Jack was such an egotist, he never would understand it!

Edward was silent for some time, thinking about Welsh. Tryers, shaking off his bad temper, began to make friends with George. He chatted with him in a clubable, gentlemanly way about cricket, the Boy Scouts, and Municipal administration. Meanwhile Edward looked at Welsh, who walked with hunched shoulders by his side, silent and absorbed. There was really something fine about the man’s face, Edward thought, though there was scarcely a feature that would bear criticism. The nose was thickened at the bridge and slightly flattened at the

point. It had a curiously unformed animal look. His chin at first gave the impression of being strong and broad and well moulded, but in profile it showed as underhung and receding. His green eyes had a slight cast, his lips were thin and very loose. His forehead was like a girl's, low and broad, but not massive: his short hair, with its tight black curls, grew close over it, in level line. To the casual observer the man would be either remarkably handsome or grotesquely ugly. Yes, every one would get a different impression from his face. A clever photographer could have made of him either a lord of men or a despicable ass. Edward was baffled and interested. The head itself did give an effect of massiveness, but even so it was an effect that one felt could not be trusted. "A mock face, a sham countenance," mused Edward, in some bewilderment. He recalled Welsh's ridiculous timidity, the abject mien he could wear. How entirely like an imbecile, and again how almost nobly, he could look!

Certainly there was nothing mediocre about him. He was not a charlatan, not true to that type. Edward kept watching him. At one moment he gave an effect of unusual harmony, at the next of something singularly incomplete and formless.

"Yes," Tryers was saying, "it won't do to let this Municipal Socialism go too far. In fact, I feel that it has reached its limits already. You remember what Chamberlain said on the subject —"

"A renegade!" George broke in decisively.

"The man was a renegade. He split the Party. Put the clock back. A most reactionary influence, I consider. And that Tariff Reform!"

Tryers had forgotten that his companion was a Radical. "Yes, yes," he replied hurriedly, "but when Chamberlain said that about Municipal Socialism he was still perfectly sound."

"I don't believe he ever was sound."

Edward decided to change the subject. "Let's talk about something that really matters," he said.

"That really matters!" George echoed indignantly. "Doesn't Free Trade matter? Doesn't the Food of the People matter?"

"Ah, George, what incorrigible humorists you Liberals are. If we're to live comfortably without doing any work, the people must go a bit short on food. Free Trade or Protection won't alter that."

"I'm of your opinion, Mr. Raynes!" Welsh declared very loudly and emphatically. "The People — these great masses of our fellow-creatures — they are abominably ill-used! And they are the noblest of us all! Think of all the vices we are cursed with, think of all our false ideas and false conventions! If you want truth and simplicity and candour and real humanity, you must go to the poor."

"Charming," Edward replied. "Moral pre-eminence of the greatest number. What a generous tribute to our social system! What more can

you want! All the same, Mr. Welsh, the poor lead disgusting lives, and they are, generally speaking, disgusting people."

The other three men clamoured in protest.

"What blasphemy!" cried Welsh.

"A gross libel on the British working classes," said George.

"I think you are most unfair," Tryers chimed in. "The poor are pretty well as good as we are, at any rate."

Socialist (for Welsh called himself a Socialist), Radical, and Conservative (Tryers was really a Conservative) were unanimous against him.

"Tell me, George," Edward went on, "are you in search of nobility and virtue? Of course you are. So are you, Tryers; don't say you're not. Follow Mr. Welsh's advice, then. Go to the poor. Then come back and tell me all about it."

"Ah, you're a cynic," exclaimed Welsh. "A Gibbonian ironist!"

George was still indignant.

"But I do see a great deal of the poor," he said. "The movements that I'm interested in are always bringing me into contact with them. And I find them a good, industrious, conscientious, clean-living lot on the whole."

"Yes, but you see them through the coloured glasses of these Movements of yours. They're not themselves with you, George. You're a gentleman

to them. Of course they know all the time that you're running them as a hobby, and they make what they can out of it."

"I don't believe it. Our motto is comradeship — comradeship on equal terms."

"You don't fool them there."

"Fool them!"

"When you get born again, George, be born a proletarian."

"I will be," cried Welsh excitedly, "upon my soul, I will be!"

"Just imagine yourself," Edward continued to address George, "as a real proletarian, with any number of criminal tendencies."

"Nonsense!" George took him up eagerly. "Most of the poor are perfectly decent and well-conducted and law-abiding."

"Then they ought to be ashamed of themselves. If a poor man hasn't criminal tendencies he can't have guts. Why should he have all our restraints and none of our advantages? What use is the law to him? Why should he abide by it? The law is for us. We've made it to protect ourselves and to keep the poor where they are."

"Anarchy! Anarchy! Magnificent, Mr. Raynes! I commend you!" Welsh was delighted.

"You are certainly right there," George gloomily observed. "It is anarchy."

"We can only hope that Raynes won't go and tell

the poor all about it," said Tryers rather feebly. He was piqued by losing his place as the chief speaker.

"Anyhow," George continued, "the law protects the poor nowadays. We've got far beyond mediæval injustice and tyranny and all that. Abolish law, and the poor would be the first to suffer."

"I don't know," cried Welsh. "Riots — revolutions — the barricades! The Sans-culottes and the Terror! There's some colour about that. Oh, you queer son of chaos," — he turned to Edward — "with your meteoric bolts!"

"One moment," Edward said. "I see a little white skirt fluttering along the path over there. Isn't that your friend, George, isn't that Norah?"

George was embarrassed. "Oh, that child?" he said in an off-hand way. Both Welsh and Tryers preserved an expectant silence.

"And now," Edward broke the pause, "why not consider Mr. Welsh and talk of something interesting? Why not debate on Mr. Welsh himself? Or shall I give you a little exposition of Mr. George Forrest's true character?"

"I hope you'll spare us that at least, Raynes." George stiffened at once.

Tryers began picking flowers as they walked.

"There you are." Edward was plaintive. "I knew George would be up in arms. He thinks we

mustn't be personal, we mustn't be too intimate."

"Come on," exclaimed Welsh, who had listened with evident approval, "come on, let's do it. Let's all discuss each other. It's a splendid idea! I'll begin. I'll tell you all about Reggie Tryers."

Tryers flushed. "I'm sorry to hamper your interesting conversation, Jack, but I'm not particularly anxious to be blackguarded in public." He went on picking flowers with accelerated energy.

"Well, then," Edward turned to George, "can't *you* do something? Tell them about me, style and substance as this morning, you remember?" He laid his hand on George's arm.

George stammered protestingly. "This is — really, Raynes, this is most unfair."

"Welsh says I'm a son of chaos, with an armoury of meteoric bolts, and you say I'm a son of luxury, idly revolving under the shadow of a wasted life. What do you say I am, Tryers?"

"I say you play with ideas like toys, and don't care a brass farthing about anything." Tryers spoke brightly and defiantly.

"You're certainly a very wicked man, I've no doubt of that," Welsh remarked with enthusiasm. "How fortunate! It's a hobby of mine, the discovery of really wicked men."

"But 'wicked' means nothing at all —"

"You prove yourself by that," Welsh exulted. "Oh, you wicked Mr. Raynes! You've shown us hoofs and tail."

"We all have them, I believe. They never were distinctive."

"About the poor," George unexpectedly declared. His thoughts had been wandering, he spoke now from a sense of duty. "About the poor. You've no idea how much better things are."

"Surely," Tryers followed on, "the modern tendency is all towards equality of opportunity." He had quite a handful of flowers by this time.

"Ah —" Edward shaded his eyes, "we are just in time to intercept our little Norah.— Do you see? She will cross our path."

Welsh and Tryers had both kept an eye on Norah since Edward's indication of her. They now instinctively quickened their steps. George cast a disapproving glance on Edward, and carefully fell a little behind. They all got over the stile into the high road before him.

"A pretty creature," Edward remarked in an undertone, as the girl came towards them. She had seen them, and carried herself with a conscious aplomb. "For complexion she couldn't do better, and that caught-in underlip is really provoking. Don't you think so, Tryers? And I'm glad she hasn't put her hair up yet. Hair should be either quite dark or blond or auburn: the between shades are always tiresome. Norah's hair is black enough to give the idea of depth, and there's so much of it. Nice long hair."

"And quite straight," Welsh put in.

"Don't stare at her like that," hissed Tryers, "You'll frighten her!"

"I like straight hair," Welsh went on.

Norah was only a few yards from them now. She turned her head slightly in their direction, smiled very rapidly, and walked a little faster.

"Norah!" Edward called. "Don't run away from us. Mr. Forrest will be heart-broken if you run away."

The girl wavered and moved a little away from them, drawing back to the opposite side of the road. Quite the right thing for her to do, Edward noted. She instinctively avoided behaving like either a minx or a prude.

"But I'm going to the Farm," she replied. "And I must get back home soon with the milk — and the butter — and the eggs."

Her voice was pitched low, and kept almost to the same level, without that rise and fall that is usual with country girls. The hesitation between every few of her words was delicious — so many unspoken things seemed to fill those interspaces! — and she laughed when she had finished speaking, with veiled challenge.

The four men gravitated slowly and spontaneously towards her. It was Welsh who fell back now, standing just behind George, observing first Norah and then Tryers with a concentrated intensity of gaze. If any admirer of his could have seen him

then, she would have been sure that this was the supreme moment of his poetic inspiration.

"My friends here," Edward continued conversationally, "have just come down from London. This gentleman," he indicated Tryers, "is an artist. He paints beautiful pictures."

Norah looked suspiciously at Tryers, who was smiling down at her. She turned away.

"He told me," Edward went on, "that he wanted to paint the prettiest girl in the village. He wants to paint you."

Norah laughed. George cleared his throat and tapped his foot on the ground. Welsh gazed without moving a muscle. "You do like teasing, Mr. Raynes," said the girl, still laughing.

Edward appealed to Tryers. "Do back me up," he said. "This young lady thinks I can't tell the truth."

"Of course, of course." Tryers' tone was brisk and business-like. He advanced with his flowers and handed them to the girl. "I picked these for you," he said, lowering his voice.

Norah took them and put them in her basket. "Oh, thank you, I'm sure," she said discouragingly.

However, Edward thought he might as well "finish the work he was in." "Perhaps to-morrow morning?" he said. "You're generally out in the morning, aren't you, Norah?"

Norah looked doubtfully up at him. She rather

liked Edward, but always suspected him of making fun of her. She was on her guard. "Yes, maybe," she replied. She gave a glance in the direction of Welsh, who was ferociously absorbing the situation. His aspect scared the girl, and she looked away, as though for protection, to George. George was on the stile, embarrassed, making funny little movements with his stick.

"Well, good-bye," Edward continued. "You'll see, you'll have a beautiful portrait."

"Good-bye," said Tryers reluctantly. "Good-bye for the present." George raised his hand, and at him the girl smiled.

The four men went on. Edward sharply realised a furtive and ashamed change in himself, in Tryers and in George. They seemed all three to have become obtrusively and awkwardly sexed, to be labouring under the effort of veiling the discomfiture of their male weakness, of forcing an aspect of immunity, of 'getting away with it.' Dignity, to all three, came in an almost farcical way, uninvited, as an absurd matter of course, inevitably incidental to their masculinity. They became grotesquely smeared over with the likeness of animals that go in herds. Edward felt resentful. He did not like having to feel furtive and ashamed at the command of his ancestors: he did not like losing himself in line with Tryers and George. And why was Welsh out of the line? He was jealous of Welsh's distinction. The lecturer remained ab-

sorbed, ruminant, quite satisfied, while Edward and the other two were mulcted, teased and flicked, stupidly driven to a pretence that they weren't.

As they turned the corner Edward glanced back and saw Norah shaking Tryers' flowers out of her basket. Her gesture was beautifully light and debonair. How easily she dealt with it all! But certainly with no abatement of the so indomitable, the so superior, tenacity of her sex.

CHAPTER VII

THEY walked in silence for some minutes: then Tryers said suddenly: "What time in the morning is she usually out?"

"Oh, early — fairly early. Before your breakfast or mine," Edward informed him.

"She'd be just round about here, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. Through the village — up to the Farm and back again to where she lives, doing errands and that kind of thing. I see her from my window pretty well every morning."

"Oh!" Tryers turned to George. "I hope you don't object," he said. "Of course, if you —"

George ruffled. "It is no business whatever of mine."

"No harm meant, you know." Tryers was eager to make it all right. George said nothing more, and a few minutes later when they reached a turning which he could take to his house he left the others rather abruptly.

Welsh laid a hand on Edward's shoulder. "Well, Pandarus," he said, "well, wicked one! Oh, corrupt, corrupt! What unscrupulousness, what mastery of the art! These diversions of a philosopher!" He leered at him.

"I see," Edward replied, "these excitements are

too much for you. Emulate your brother-in-law's remarkable self-command."

"And Reggie!" Welsh opened his mouth and grinned at Tryers. "Reggie led into temptation! Ah, how you'll suffer for this later on, in agony and sweat!"

"I do what I choose." Tryers turned on him. "You will find that out, too, later on, that I do what I choose."

"Mr. Raynes,"—Welsh clasped Edward's arm—"my brother-in-law is always most interesting in this kind of mood. Pray observe him. He has fallen. You know he thinks he ought to lead a monastic life, and he's quite right: he has the mediæval religious nature. He's like Saint Augustine before conversion. He has reached the stage now of sinning against the light. The most interesting of all stages; I am wondering how long it will last. This is one of his relapses that you've just brought about. Reggie alternates just now between the divine and the devilish spirit."

Tryers, who had been attempting interruptions, could now hardly speak for rage. It was easy to read his humiliation by this presentment of himself as a spectacle turned to account for the interest of the moment. "Damn you, Jack," he gulped, "I won't have this. You are a cad."

"I'm always telling him," Welsh continued, "that he'd really be happier if he overcame the devilish mood altogether. His energies, you see, would then

be released. He would be more tranquil, more at ease — and he would produce. He might plan some great Cathedral, for example, to-morrow morning instead of pretending to sketch little Norah."

"What a tease you are!" Edward laughed. "For all you know, he may plan his Cathedral after lunch."

"No, he won't. He'll be either suffering the torments of repentance or the torments of desire." Welsh's eyes glistened.

Tryers looked at him with savage persistency of hatred. "Well," he said, as with his back to the wall, "at any rate, Raynes, this shows you the truth of what I was telling you."

Edward steered out of danger. "And you, Mr. Welsh," he observed politely, "you, I suppose, are remote from the usual temptations. You stand apart, a spectator, regarding with philosophic calm the frailties of men, and putting them all in their place."

"Well —" the other hesitated, "I admit that I find it a little fatiguing — a trifle tiresome, to deal with — er — objective matter. It's not in my line. I find it so much more easy, more satisfactory, simply to imagine. 'Whosoever looketh on a woman —' — you remember?"

"That text must be very consoling to you."

"Ah, it is! it is!" Welsh was radiant. "Somehow — I don't know why — but the circumstances of the quest — the apparatuses — the things you have

to do, the ways you have to go about it — they are all so very troublesome, so very commonplace, so very vulgar. I really cannot.— And my material is so simple. I am content with almost anything. The beach at Littlehampton in the summer, for example. It is quite enough for me to sit there. I can sit on that beach for hours together.”

“Holding a silent orgy?” inquired Edward. “I should have thought that was rather exhausting.”

“So it is,” Tryers exclaimed indignantly. “That’s why Welsh has this frightful nervous dyspepsia. It’s all through that cursed Cerebralism of his.”

“It’s worth it!” cried Welsh.

Tryers shuddered,— all over his body, as he often did, suggesting a snake. “It’s horrible,” he said with conviction.

“Just think,” Welsh branched off, “what a priest you would make, Reggie. You are cut out for a priest. Think of the confessions! You would understand everything so well — oh, I can just hear you, counselling your penitents. How exciting! In a church you had planned yourself, with infinite care! — And the next morning, when they came up to the Altar Rails — repentant — these passionate eager boys and tremulous yielding girls — human — all — too — human! Ah, how much you could make of that! You would know it *all*, remember,— they would glance up at you, they would know that you knew it all. How shyly they would glance, with

what exquisite shame! And you would be their *priest*. They *must* tell you. Can't you imagine their sweet reluctance, their pain — and with their pain a certain dangerous pleasure? Oh, what sensations!"

Tryers coloured deeply: he was moved. "You are a devil," he said, swishing with his stick. "I wish I had never met you."

"My dear Reggie," Welsh spoke with a contemptuous reminiscence that surprised Edward, "you were nothing when I met you first. It is I who have educated you." He seemed to expand as he spoke, to be somehow blown out.

"You damnable egotist! You've done nothing for me, except to bring up and exaggerate my worst qualities. That's what I was telling Raynes."

"I think you hate yourself too when you hate me," Welsh blandly remarked, "don't you, Reggie, just a little?"

Tryers did not answer. His face was set. It seemed to contain an extraordinary number of sharp angles. Edward, looking at him, wondered how he managed to shave without cutting himself. His nose gave the impression of being part of a geometrical figure.

"I mean to get out of it all," he said after the pause. "You shall see. I will not be tormented by you, or through you, any longer." His cheeks kept their flush.

There was another silence between the three men.

Edward broke it. "Have you ever," he asked Tryers in his equable way, "have you ever thought of marriage as a possible escape?"

"Marriage!" Tryers started as though a bee were on him. "Certainly not. Never. It is servitude: it is degradation. It is cutting one's life out; it is mutilation." He shivered.

Edward smiled, recalling the singular adroitness that Tryers had displayed in marrying off his three sisters, all of them to "old College pals."

"Besides," Tryers continued, "you know what I feel about women. Apart from a very transient sex-attraction — they lose it for me nearly always as soon as they leave off being girls — I find them intolerable. I avoid places where there are likely to be many of them, I get as far away from them as possible in restaurants. I avoid them as I would dogs, and dogs I detest."

"There is something in what he says," Welsh commented thoughtfully. "If you ever happen to overhear women talking among themselves, it really is most unpleasant. They are like some sort of disturbing insect."

"I have to deal with them professionally sometimes," Tryers went heatedly on. "That's one of my worst trials. They seem to have even worse taste in architecture than they have in everything else. Upon my word!"

"I'm with you, Reggie." Welsh spoke without the other's enthusiasm in hostility. He did not seem

to be much interested. "Here at least," he continued, "we join hands. There is certainly something ineradicably gross and unfastidious about the feminine temperament. Their feelings are blunter, their emotional range is far less wide."

"Of course," Tryers broke in eagerly. "If a little girl cuts her finger, it's nothing to her: a little boy suffers real pain. No man could survive child-bearing."

"Perhaps not," said Edward, "if they wore corsets. But they wouldn't."

"Don't talk of corsets," Tryers interjected, "you make me feel ill. They are almost as unpleasant to think of as hair-pins."

"Yes," Welsh agreed, "do let us choose a more pleasing subject."

"Where women are unpleasant," said Edward, "it's simply because they've been stupidly treated. Same with the proletariat. You have them as you've bred them, that's always the way."

"Well, they've had their revenge," Welsh spoke decidedly. "They've had their revenge, and they're having it all the time. In England they have it more completely than anywhere else."

"How about America?" Edward asked. "You've been in America a good deal for lecturing, haven't you? Haven't women revenged themselves over there?"

"Well, no, they haven't—not really. The American women are dominant, of course, in their

way. The men fetch and carry for them and give them all the money they want. But the two sexes there are in separate spheres, women aren't forever dragging the men over the line into their ground, and mixing them up with their little snobberies and spites and imbecilities. The American man is really wonderfully independent. You'd think he was being tyrannised over, to see him with his women, but he isn't. It is we Englishmen who are the slaves, really: it is our individuality that is always being invaded. Yes, I'm sure these things are better managed in America."

"Sounds quite probable." Edward was interested. "In England the women are restive, they're always trying to get even. In America there's no need for them to get even at all. Much more satisfactory arrangement all round."

"The American man," Welsh resumed, "is absolute master in his own sphere. He has his business, his politics, his sport, most of his other amusements, all to himself. There are even theatres where only men go. The women have their homes: they manage what they call 'that end of it,' and quite right. I hate the way husbands have in England of fussing about their houses — you know that insufferable kind of discussion — improvements in the bathroom or the garden or the drainage. One hears nothing else in some families. I tell you, I have blushed for my sex!"

"All the same," said Tryers combatively, "Amer-

ican women are intolerable too. All that I've ever met talked the most frightful nonsense about art and literature and morality and social questions. They seem to learn up a number of catch-phrases, and they repeat them in a string without thinking. They are appallingly ignorant, really. One finds that out in a few minutes.— At any rate Englishwomen have the sense to talk less."

"Why shouldn't women talk?" said Welsh lazily. "You needn't listen. Englishwomen expect you to talk to them; that is much worse. I'd far rather have to do with the Americans. You simply sit and say monosyllables now and then, and think of something else. It is far less trouble. That's another way in which the American men score."

"You have catch-phrases everywhere," Edward put in, "only I suppose American women have greater command of them, because of their greater energy. And you notice them as catch-phrases simply because they're not the phrases you're used to."

"Besides," Welsh remarked, "I rather like that intense preoccupation with meaningless speech. Anything is better than that cursed vanity of the Englishwoman who is always afraid of giving herself away. How inelastic she is, how supine! And, really, believe me, much more banal than the American. If we must have banalities let them at least be unrestricted.— And then our English snobbishness, invented by women, kept up religiously by women,

never to be escaped from anywhere! Ah, yes, they have their revenge."

"But our men support them well," said Edward, "so far as snobbishness goes."

"I suppose they do. Good Lord!" Welsh swept on, rapidly, eagerly. "The English are an unpardonable race! It's only by being on an island that they aren't shamed and swamped out of the world! Look at the great middle class, the representative class. What are they doing? What are they after? What do they want?" He was unconsciously taking on his lecturing manner; he made frequent gestures. Edward was surprised by their grace and force. "The whole and single-hearted devotion of every family — above the actual poor — within five miles of where I live, is to score off every other family by advancing — oh, by the width of your finger-nail — on the social staircase. I should like to establish by force, say, three classes — each with its proper uniform — divide the whole lot, arbitrarily and once for all. It's worst of all in the country if you're not a complete stranger stopping at an inn. This awful business of every one knowing every one else — it resolves itself into an orgy of servility and spite, and it makes you afraid of putting your foot outside your door. By heaven!"

Edward, impressed, looked at the speaker. A spirit of force, of life, seemed suddenly to have snatched Welsh: he was literally transfigured. His

face had gained strength astonishingly, it had lost its incompleteness and its lack of harmony.

"The thing strikes me," he went on, "as perfectly amazing. America! There is nothing in America to compare with it. And they do it so badly and so blunderingly, these people. They can't even manage their own little games. Really and truly, *our* class — this upper middle class of England, this class of pseudo ladies and gentlemen, is the most dilapidated and wretched social phenomenon ever produced in the world! They give you a sense of shame — of *shame* — so poignant that it positively sickens! Any revolution — any — *any* — which would dash out and scatter forever these detestable little circles — it would be like a second Incarnation. I tell you, I grow sick for America sometimes — for any other country. I want some one to talk to — a coloured Pullman porter, a Bowery 'crook,' a Western 'drummer,' a New York 'gun-man,' a Chicago 'vaudeville' artiste, a Pennsylvania miner, an Italian immigrant, a French procuress, a Russian spy! I long to exchange ideas with some sort of a natural animal. These English — 'they are neither beast nor human, man nor woman' — they are not even eidola or lemures — they are simply Our Class — at Home."

Edward restrained a desire to applaud. Tryers was moody and irritable from his brother-in-law's eloquence.

"He always exaggerates absurdly," he com-

mented. "Don't you think that's a mistake, Raynes? One can't carry an argument that way."

"Lord love you," Edward replied. "Mr. Welsh doesn't want to carry an argument. He wants to set up an impression. And one can't exaggerate about English snobbery. Only it isn't peculiar to our class. You only think that because you know your own class better than any other. Snobbishness in other classes takes a different form and you don't recognise it."

"But surely the poor aren't snobs," Welsh remonstrated.

"The poor again! I must introduce you to my housekeeper. She's not of the peasant class herself, but her mother was. Her father was a tradesman who married beneath him. She knows a great deal about the peasantry, at first hand, and she is not tolerant of them. No more tolerant than you are of your class, give you my word."

"But,"—Welsh was still remonstrant—"it can't be the same, surely. Their lives must be more natural."

"Of course it's not the same. Or rather it's the same with a difference—an accidental difference. Every peasant family is bent on showing that it's superior to every other. Only they don't use middle-class methods. They throw out perfectly good food on the refuse heap when their children are going hungry, to show that they're better off than their neighbours. For a change that method's no doubt

less aggravating than the ones we're used to. But it's quite equally aggravating when you're familiar with it, especially when the hungry children are your nephews and nieces. My sympathies are with my housekeeper."

"Good Lord! I'd no idea they did things like that." Welsh was a little baffled. "Still, it isn't really so bad. And I don't object to waste. The spilt wine, the crushed flower. There's a certain picturesqueness, a certain courage —"

"Not at all. There is nothing but mean vanity and petty pretentiousness. Your middle-class snob is equally courageous. He gives up heaps of things which he misses as much as the poor miss food, in order to make a show."

"But look at their faces," cried Welsh, "the faces of the workers and the faces of our lot. You must see that the masses are the more human —"

"Oh, get along with you," Edward laughed, "you and your idealism. Been surveying the rustic types in the Royal Academy?"

"And then," Welsh went on with renewal of spirit, "the peasants have something to do. The men till the soil, the women have all their time filled with their house-work and their babies. They haven't the same leisure for snobbery."

"Both the men and the women are drugged with work till they're stupid. But they're just as much snobs as if they were idle, and they're harder to cure."

Welsh's energy seemed to forsake him. He was evidently soon bored by argument. "But I can't believe it," he murmured. "I simply can't believe it."

"Then the aristocrats," Edward resumed, "they're just as snobbish in their way as we are."

Tryers' attention quickened at the mention of the aristocracy. The devotion of generations to the landed gentry ran in his blood, and he had very definite ideas about "a gentleman's hall-marks."

"Oh, I don't agree with you there, Raynes," he said. "Whenever I've had to deal with a genuine aristocrat, I've found him quite different. That's the mark of a really well-born man, that he isn't conscious of his birth. Why, he's no need to think of the social ladder and all that. He's on the top, and every one knows it. That's the secret of the good manners of the aristocracy; they're never afraid of being in a false position."

"Yes, that's what people think," replied Edward. "But aristocratic snobbishness is simply a different variety. They aren't always pretending to belong to the class above them, simply because there isn't a class above them. But they are conscious of their birth, inordinately conscious. They don't show that they are, they're trained not to, because bragging about one's family became a middle-class fashion, and the aristocracy always drops middle-class fash-

ions. There is really, when you come to think of it, a subtle snobbishness in *not* bragging about one's birth."

"Oh, I say, Raynes," Tryers exclaimed, just like George, "that's mere sophistry!"

"They used to brag in the eighteenth century, and they brag now, inside. They brag among themselves under the secure shadows of the family portraits. The young of their kind haven't always learnt discretion, they sometimes brag openly. I was disillusioned about the aristocracy at my public school. There were several of them there, and they were ingrained snobs, nearly all of them; snobs on fixed principle. The only aristocrat I ever knew well later on was the younger son of a marquess, and after awhile he fairly launched out on the subject of his family tree. Being well-born is a very important thing to them, Tryers, I assure you, and they like the world to know all about it. As you say, if they're actually titled or if for some other reason they're saved the trouble of advertising, they needn't and they don't advertise. But when advertisement happens to be necessary, they'll manage it somehow, you can bet your boots."

"But that's all quite different," Tryers rejoined impatiently, "that isn't the kind of snobbishness we were talking about."

"What's the difference between wanting people to know that you're in a direct male line from the Conquest and wanting them to know that your

mother's aunt married an 'Honourable'? What's the difference between wanting to get into the Court Set and wanting to be asked to dinner by the Lord of the Manor? The essence of snobbishness is waste of energy over social distinction. Energy that might be used in a nicer way than for feeding several kinds of mean vices, starving the pleasant virtues, making some people pitiable unhappy and discontented and others pitiable satisfied and smug. No, one can't let off the aristocracy."

"Admirable!" Welsh was relieved to find himself again in agreement. "I'm delighted to hear it."

"No doubt," continued Edward, "the aristocrats 'manage their little games' better than the middle-classes. They ought to. They've had longer and more careful training; it's definitely marked out as their line of business. They are professionals, our people are amateurs."

"Well, that's something," said Tryers resolutely. "If it has to be done, let it be well done. At any rate, the aristocrats have art."

"Yes, but they're losing it, especially in England —"

"They are, they are!" Welsh broke in. "O, for the air of a French *marquis* — the port of a Spanish don — the grace of an Italian *contessa*! How they would put all our ridiculous duchesses to shame! England is preposterous!" He made a gesture, expelling his country from himself.

"Other countries have real class barriers," said Edward. "That makes a difference. I don't know how it works — whether on the whole things are more tolerable. I expect, though, you'd find a lot that wouldn't please you, Welsh, if you were a Frenchman or an Italian. One can't ever tell."

"You bring us all to silence." Welsh evaded by flattery. "You carry the bearing-rein, and no mistake. You are a master."

"I will tell you," replied Edward, "what you are. You are a flatterer. That makes the seventh or eighth time that you have called me a master to-day. And the psychology of your flattery would be rather interesting, if one could get at it. You don't do it out of irony. That wouldn't be like you."

"He flatters because he is an ingrained craven," said Tryers with emphasis.

"I don't flatter." Welsh was bewildered. "I really do think that you are a master."

"Why of course you do," Edward chuckled. "That's your way. You heighten the character — abilities and vices — of every one you meet, because that makes it more interesting and sensational for you. So you're always moving among remarkable men: the plan plays magnificently into the hands of your egoism. It works all round."

"Well, but —" Welsh was still puzzled "— we are remarkable people, aren't we? How frightfully dull it would be if we weren't!"

Edward chuckled again. "Upon my word," he

declared, "there's something to be said for your method, especially if you've really succeeded in convincing yourself. But don't you make all your friends fearfully vain?"

"I don't mind my friends being vain," replied the other, as though that settled the question.

"You're the most beautiful and complete egoist I've ever met." Edward was more and more delighted. "And I'm beginning to agree entirely with our friend that your influence is dangerous. But not in the way you think, Tryers. What Welsh does — so I imagine — is to take the people he meets and fix their types at once — making them much more types than they really are, and heightened, as I've said, inconceivably at all points. At the same time he gives them a huge conceit in being what he makes them out to be, and there they are, there they rest. Whatever they do or say, Welsh will make it fit in with his idea of them and clap them on the back. He'll infect them, if he can, with his paralytic microbes — and all because it pleases him, because it's what he wants. He hates effort, so he surrounds himself with atrophied friends. Oh, his influence is perfectly poisonous!"

Welsh was immensely pleased, and responded by curious inarticulate sounds of excitement and gratification.

"Yes," cried Tryers, dexterously running in on Edward's lead, "Raynes is quite right. You're incapable of judging people — you know nothing about

character. You twist everything to suit your morbid ideas. Then you think you've had an influence. You're a fool! A buffoon!" Tryers energetically proclaimed. "He's a buffoon!"

"Oh, no," said Edward, "he isn't. That's where you make a mistake." He was arrested by a disquieting thought which he immediately banished. They were now at the gate of his little drive. Edward began to prepare his mind for dinner.

CHAPTER VIII

TRYERS was not quite sure whether Edward was really going to make him sleep at the Inn. He hoped not, but it was, to use a phrase which was often in Welsh's mouth, a phrase pronounced with all the young vigour of a thing in early flush, a "hope against hope." These urbane decisions of Edward's, as Tryers knew, were peculiarly stable, and as the evening wore on it became more and more apparent to the disconsolate architect that he might just as well have reconciled himself and ordered his room at once at the Wolcote Arms. Yet perhaps — if only Raynes would drink a little more Port, if only he would drift in his imperceptible way towards an indulgent mood — but nothing came of these expectations. Edward had no taste for taking too much to drink: mornings were as much to him as evenings.

So they sat together after dinner, and Tryers talked angrily about his soul, as one might talk about an ill-trained puppy who is always giving no end of trouble: Welsh talked of the Catholic Modernist Movement, for which he was just then fervent. Protestantism, he said, was so harsh and so stubborn, striking everywhere discordantly, disagree-

able to oneself and to all one's friends. It must be weakened, and if you strengthened Catholicism by reinforcing it as the Modernists wished, Catholicism would pulverise all these irritating little individualist sects in no time. Then, Welsh explained, we shall all of us be able to live freely, for the Catholics always let you live as you like, provided you're on their side. Only the few — the inner circle of Catholics — must be allowed latitude of belief, they must keep it to themselves, of course, they must cultivate an "ironical submission" to all dogmas; they must frequent all rites with exquisite scrupulousness, outwardly they must support unity with never a lapse, they must accept everything, and, "well, between ourselves, my friends," Welsh had concluded, "they really *needn't believe anything*. The *Catholic idea*, that is first and last and all."

Edward attended to all this, for he was interested in any further revelation of Welsh's fantastic mind. The man was more remote from the facts of life than any one he had met: and he was almost equally remote from ideas. Every idea had, it seemed, to be reduced to a kind of embryo of itself in his brain, and then it shot up and round and about into altogether incalculable and capricious shapes. Edward wondered what the Abbé Loisy or Father Tyrrell would have made of this Modernism that Welsh expounded. And how guileless and naïve was this way he had, of launching his ideas into free air to wing their course, all obstacles of the common earth re-

moved! Once or twice Edward reminded him of other factors that would come in, factors that might affect this Catholic regeneration, this annihilation of the Protestant. Welsh looked rather troubled for a moment, said "Ah, yes, there is that," and then forgot all about it. He resumed his eloquence. Certainly he spoke well. He had command, he had vividness and richness of imagery, a striking faculty for rhetorical invective and rhetorical panegyric. At the same time phrases of the "hoping against hope" sort were continually with him, and he gave them the same luxurious garnish as others that escaped triteness. All that he said was tremendously helped on, given double and treble value, by expression of face and pitch of voice. He could carry off flagrant banalities, lunatic assertions, inept speculations. Edward reflected that he was born for the stage.

Meanwhile Tryers did all he could to divert every subject to his own spiritual state: he was always wanting to strike topics off to his soul, just as some batsmen always want to strike the balls off to leg.

"But that wouldn't help me," he said when Welsh talked of his Catholic Idea: and again, when Edward had led Welsh on to say more about America, "Ah, yes," Tryers had broken in, "I think, somehow, that in a new country there would be fewer temptations."

No word was spoken of little Norah; but towards eleven o'clock Tryers, who had grown more and

more silent, got up and said he would go to the Inn. He was tired and would like to be in bed early. "And to get up early?" lightly rejoined Edward. Tryers winced. "Of course you are my guest at the Inn," Edward added as he showed him out. This made the architect a little happier.

When Edward returned to the room he found that Welsh had fallen into a profound sleep during what must have been rather less than a minute. The achievement was impressive in itself, but Edward was not altogether pleased with the result. The sleeper looked his very worst. His jaw had dropped like a dead man's: it struck Edward that a phrase used that evening by Welsh — one of his better phrases — "the cunning of a corpse" — was applicable now. Edward stood and looked at him, and as he looked he liked that dropped jaw less and less. Welsh's teeth were bad; two or three of them, like his trouser-buttons, were missing, and one had been capped prominently with gold, obviously by an American dentist. Gold that showed in the mouth was abhorrent to Edward. He must, he felt, change the appearance of the face: he could not have it there like that. He went out into the dining-room and collected several apples of different sizes; then he came back and stood with the apples in his hands, surveying Welsh and gauging the distance between the chest and the place where the chin would come if the mouth were shut. Welsh's head was bent down a little as he sat. It might be necessary to bend it

down a little more. Edward took the largest apple and went over to the sleeper. He raised the chin, placed the apple underneath it, and with his other hand gently and slowly pushed the head further down, so that the apple was secured between chin and chest, and Welsh's mouth kept shut. It was all done remarkably adroitly and delicately. The apple stayed in position, and Welsh did not move nor make any sound. He might have been drugged.

Edward, satisfied, turned from him and sat down in an armchair by his bureau to write two or three letters that had been crowded out by the occupations of the day. He always wrote in an armchair, with his paper on a light wooden board that rested almost perpendicularly against one raised knee. Of course he used a fountain-pen, that, being his, was always in perfect order and had not needed any repair since it was bought ten years before. No man in the United Kingdom managed the act of tracing ink into words on paper with greater ease than Edward. He never bent his head uncomfortably, and his paper rested nearly level with his eyes.

As he prepared for his letter, Edward wondered why most people were content to write at desks and tables, sitting on horrid little chairs, with vision stooped to paper on a flat surface below them. He concluded that habit and want of reflection must account for it. People were always making themselves uncomfortable from habit. This perpetuation all round of inconvenient ways, how astonishingly stupid

it was! Putting eggs in boiling water that goes on boiling and hardens the white, — using pencils that have to be sharpened — it was that kind of stupidity that Edward thought so peculiarly unnecessary and absurd. These little discomforts, so easily avoided, what could induce any one to put up with them at this time of day? And the dull obstinacy people had in clinging to them! They would babble about reform and Acts of Parliament, but what Act of Parliament ever laid a finger on the individual life with any real intimacy of touch? It would make no personal difference whatever, for instance, to George, if Ireland had Home Rule or if the Welsh Church were disestablished; it would not really make any difference worth considering if he had to pay an extra penny or two Income Tax, but it certainly would make a difference to him, a daily difference, if he left off eating eggs that had been relentlessly boiled, or if he took to using a pencil with a stick of lead that screwed out. Edward drew a breath and took his fountain-pen from his waistcoat pocket. He began his letter. Welsh continued to sleep as though he were in bed.

Edward was writing to the landlady of the furnished rooms that he always took in Liverpool. They were near the Central Station, very convenient: the landlady was a widow in the thirties, an Austrian, with whom Edward had no fault to find except that she expected him to make love to her and was disappointed because he didn't. How should he begin the

letter? "Dear Madam" or even "Dear Mrs. Weiss" wouldn't do; it was important to keep on the right side of this very emotional creature, he was sure no other lodgings in Liverpool would suit him so well as hers. But he really couldn't call her by her Christian name, he couldn't bring himself to that; it seemed somehow to compromise his personality; besides he couldn't remember her Christian name. "Dear Lady" he thought of, but that sounded annoyingly like the form of address prevalent in third-rate plays. It suggested the middle-aged man-of-the-world "philosopher" parleying with the woman who seems dangerously on the point of running away from her husband, but of course in the end, after the interview with the middle-aged adviser, never does. "My friend" was too much like Jack Welsh: he couldn't write "My friend" after that afternoon. And he knew that Mrs. Weiss's sensitive feelings would be seriously hurt if he were to begin the letter without preliminary, saying straight away: "I shall be in Liverpool on the 27th, and hope you will be able to arrange, etc." It was a problem.

Edward looked round the room. There was Welsh, sitting just as he had left him, the apple still in place. His mouth had come a little open, but it wasn't nearly so badly open as before. His nostrils closed and expanded with his regular breathing; his abdomen, too, heaved with regularity, with engaging regularity. Edward looked from him to the

inanimate objects of the room. There they were, all of them, with that peculiar patience of theirs, a patience inseparable from inanimate and familiar objects, particularly at night, when the lamp is lit, and the house still. They all looked as though they would wait for any one forever. A strange thrill of the sense of eternity passed through Edward. "I ought to be looking at stars, or the sea, or mountains," he thought, "to feel like this." And he was only looking at chairs, and a table, and a writing-desk at which he never wrote.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the everlasting writing-desk," he murmured. But, strangely for him, he did not smile. At that moment he was serious: and after all if a writing-desk does suggest eternity, why be afraid of coupling the two, and why be amused when you have done it?

"I write to you, kindest of ladies, to say that —" Yes, that would do. Rather a silly sort of thing to say, of course, but then one can't have everything, Mrs. Weiss would like that, and it wouldn't "let him in." He wrote the words, and had finished the letter in two or three minutes.

"Ironical gallantry"—he felt sure that Welsh would employ that one of his phrases if he were to see the letter. It was a phrase that he had used more than once that day: all his phrases were subject to repetition. "Well," mused Edward, "I suppose because he is lazy . . ." But "ironical gallantry" certainly did give an idea of Edward's relations to

Mrs. Weiss. He always tried to make her think that he didn't make love to her only because he didn't quite dare, because he respected her, because he was afraid to trust himself, or any other damn nonsense that these women would swallow. "Kindest of ladies." Edward made a face.

He wrote two more letters, with equal rapidity, but without premeditation. One to his bankers, pointing out that they had not allowed him interest on his Deposit Account, another to a Railway Company claiming a refund for the unused portion of a return-ticket. When the letters were finished Edward moistened their envelopes with water that he always had put in a little china receptacle on his desk. He used Post Office envelopes, the kind that is ready-stamped.

Having put the letters in their right place, ready for posting the next morning, Edward walked over to his bookshelf, softly, so as not to wake Welsh. He would rather read than talk just then, he thought. He shot a dubious glance at the apple, but the apple admirably remained. What book should he take? He had had a surfeit of twentieth century writers lately, he wanted to read some one who wasn't perpetually conscious either of his period or of himself or of the public taste. Consciousness in one or other of these directions he had found it difficult to escape from with authors of the present day. Some of them seemed forever trying to impress him that they were up-to-date, that they spoke with the latest pos-

sible speech, others seemed to write because they found themselves so interesting that they simply could not keep a good thing dark any longer, others — the greater number — wrote evidently to pull a good thing off for their pockets. He felt that they gauged the public after the manner of an advertising agent, that they compiled auxiliary note-books, always carried about with them, full of simple rules, easily remembered and helping no end for sales. But Edward was inclined to prefer this sort of writer to those others who tip-toed eternally after style, reminding him of clever boys who want to win scholarships. It was better, after all, to want to be a best seller — a more honest and a more wholesome ambition. Edward felt he would rather have a reputation in the Circulating Library than a reputation in the literary coteries. The best sellers, too, irritated him less than the people who went in for the contemporary social forces "stunt." That kind of preoccupation seemed peculiarly fatal to their sense of proportion, peculiarly fatal to Edward's pleasure. No, he did not want to read modern writers to-night: he did not want to be annoyed by feminist problems, by catch-penny tricks of plot and situation, or by affectations of speech such as "lacklove" and "perdurable" and "emprise," "her whom he thus happened on," and other such forced darling flowers so profusely scattered in certain darling little novels. Edward remembered a word of four letters, current

chiefly in boys' schools, exactly descriptive of people who wrote like this.

There was Dostoevsky — he might read him to-night. "The Idiot"— he had never finished that. No doubt that Dostoevsky was remarkable; but why did he always write such very long books, and why were there always so very many people in them? Edward felt that he really could not tackle those teasing names to-night. When he thought of Dostoevsky he found himself longing for a novel in which there were no names: sometimes in reading Dostoevsky he had longed for a world in which there were no names. No, it was too exhausting, this coping with so egregious a multiplicity of incidents and personalities. Tiresome that it should be so, for Edward knew that Dostoevsky was a genius. Still, Turgenev was the man for him and always would be. Turgenev condensed: he had that "economy of material" so pleasing to Edward in whatever form. He would read Turgenev to-night, or perhaps de Maupassant.

As he was reaching for a possible volume his eyes fell on a very recent work, by a writer very much of the present day. Edward paused. This new author was a curious and rather notable freak: he had a mania for what he called great, simple, and elemental things; they were the eternal heritage of humanity, and he thought that this eternal heritage was now in danger of being lost, and that it was "up to "

him to advertise it thoroughly, so that the world should know what it was losing. Advertise it he certainly did, and thoroughly: he bawled simple and elemental things in a Fleet-street voice, and he bawled loudest when he was showing off such eternal instinctive human tendencies as the tendency to get drunk or the tendency to go to church. He called himself a democrat, on the ground, presumably, that the masses were superstitious and liked beer, and he approved of their being superstitious and liking beer. He preached a happiness of very visible signs, a happiness displaying itself in adipose jollities, bulbous laughs, Christmas appetites, hearths and homes so redolent of family affections that the sensitive nose may track them out from miles away, and a Christianity relieving the sometimes too monotonous grossness of these delights by a comfortable pretence at mysticism and an introduction of a vague idea of the "eternal verities" at appropriate seasons. He was inordinately respectable at bottom, this writer, with an inborn awe of the decencies of the average jurymen: only he was more decent than the average jurymen. Edward felt as he read him that he could stand these mild buttery or lardy indulgences, these smug meaty comforts, these shallow obstinate religiosities, these little villa-bred virtues, as they really were, or as the honest Dickens set them forth: it was only when they took the form of a proclaimed cult that they became offensive. To have them shouted at you and distorted — really quite morbidly — by

laborious methods of advertisement, it was this that was intolerable. This new seer had all sorts of tricks, chiefly acrobatic, to attract attention. He was regarded by some as a master of brilliant paradox. "A spittoon," he would write, "is just as much in the heart of the Universe as the Milky Way;" thus, you see, expounding the divinity of common things. He would take two words conveying two incongruous ideas — "angels" and "pint-pots," for example — and clap them together like a Salvation Army instrument. In this way he had gained an enormous reputation for originality; young men and women in the literary circles read him and talked about him perpetually, he was quite a lion with them. Anglicans and reactionaries counted him as a force on their side; they bought him and drew his name into general conversation. The average juryman did not read his books at all, and if he happened to dip into one unawares he thought it utter nonsense. The worst of it was that no one could help dipping into this author now and again. He wrote perpetually, for his tricks were easily repeated, and he wrote everywhere — in daily papers, in weeklies, in quarterlies: he published two or three novels or volumes of Essays every year, the bookstalls were strewn with him. There was no escape. One admitted that he knew how to get on.

Edward turned the pages of the book, he too took one of those inevitable "dips." He could understand the man's influence, only it was such an unpleas-

ant influence. A minute ago, and for many minutes before that, there had been a hush in the air, hanging like some living breath, like some diffused soul or emanation of a soul not individual. Edward's thoughts had seemed to come to him from a distance, automatically: tiny unimportant things they had seemed, as tiny and unimportant as birds hopping here and there over buttresses silent and immense. Now the hush lifted, the hanging breath melted, caught back suddenly, one might think, to some region beyond and profound: all the magic of the hour was gone, a single phrase of this book had dissipated it. It was as though a pantaloon in complete habit had dropped through the ceiling; dropped, jumped, kicked, somersaulted, grimaced, reeled off his patter, string upon string. "Here we are again!" Edward was resentful: it is always annoying when writers whom one dislikes show talent enough to produce an impression. "And this is the modern apostle of mysticism and religion, the champion of the fairies!" he thought, as he put the book back on the shelves.

His eyes rested on a favourite print of his, a print of one of Benozzo Gozzoli's angels, from the frescoes of the Palazzo Riccardi. What a delicious ragamuffin angel it was! A darling little female street-urchin in wings! How one would love to take her up and touse her and mouse her, pull her hair and her ears and rubble her cheeks and roll her over and over! How ravishing to tumble her like that

again and again till there was hardly a breath left in her body! Notions of this kind gave Edward the greatest pleasure. He thought of the Italian word for a young girl—"ragazza"—"ragazzina"—"ragazzetta"—words that gave him pleasure of the same sort. They suggested an amorous rough-and-tumble just as Gozzoli's angel did. A ragamuffin angel! Was that at all like those incongruous combinations that he had been deploring? Of course not: the conjunction of words had occurred naturally, it had come in a flash, it was right, altogether right, perfectly and charmingly right. That ragamuffin charm was heightened most captivately by the wings: there was the painter's secret, prompting Edward's phrase, and it was a secret the painter had won from Life, he hadn't been training as one trains for tricks. The deliciousness of this angel was both familiar and strange: it had the same kind of breathless startling attraction as comes from a girl who is like a boy or dressed as a boy, from a young witch, from a woman's voice low-pitched, from robust beauty shaken and weakened by passion, from loveliness delicate and fastidious but by some chance dishevelled—yes, it was like all these alluring combinations of opposed impressions.

Edward remained standing by the bookcase, and the room grew still again; again the hush gathered and hung. A vague impulse came on him, an impulse to express, to collect and preserve somehow the essence of what he really was. Some sure and per-

manent means for the conveyance of his sense of life, that was what he wanted and couldn't get. He was sure he never could get it. If he sat down to write, some elf would light at once on the edge of his brain, some cursed gnome or other, derisive, mischievous, a little devil that would sit there on the edge and paddle with his legs, stirring up in the pool of memories a hundred recollections of the kinds of expressions that belonged to other men. Edward's own expression, his proper heritage, would remain an undiscovered embryo, a ridiculous egg far down in obscure weedy depths, while the surface of the water was crowded with splashing changelings, intercepting always, evoked without fail on the instant by this malevolent gnome. No, Edward made up his mind that he would not humiliate himself again by trying to write; he would produce no dimmed reflections of Henry James, would wake no forlorn echoes of Meredith in prose or Swinburne in verse. He would be damned if he was going to trail along at the heels of Turgenev or de Maupassant. He came near to resentment against these favourite authors of his when he realised how inevitably set and glued to the mould of one or the other of them he became whenever he tried to write. They had robbed him of his own, that was what they had done. If only he could have written something that resembled them all, that wouldn't be so bad, that would be new and might be interesting, but it was always one or the other, detached, that caught him up and gripped him like a

puppy, in mid air, with his own feet,— the feet that after all belonged to him,— clear off the ground. Well: after all, he could live, he could put himself into his life. It was odd, Edward reflected, that people thought him lazy. He wasn't lazy at all, no one could manage his life as he did, so thoroughly and so harmoniously, without definite energy. He was conscious of abounding energy, energy quite as "vital," to use a favourite word of George's, as George's own: only Edward could not bring himself to waste it, as George did, on exhausting trivialities that led nowhere, or silly treadmill exercises. Edward spent all his vigour, so he felt, on the cultivation of his existence as an organism: and this reminded him that it was quite contrary to his code to allow himself to be vexed in this childish way because he couldn't write, because he couldn't get hold of that confounded egg and hatch it. And after all, he might, some day. Perhaps what he needed was an influence; perhaps — it might conceivably be — if he married —

The dislodgment and fall of the apple from under Welsh's chin broke in on Edward's meditations. Welsh had wakened: he was one of those who are immediately wide awake after sleep.

"What was that?" he said. He saw the apple, which had rolled to the fender, and associated it with his waking. "An apple?" he questioned vaguely. "*Had* I an apple? I don't think I will eat it now."

"You have had a beautiful sleep," remarked Ed-

ward. "You have been sleeping for nearly two hours. It is close on one o'clock."

"Yes, I can sleep anywhere — anywhere." Welsh spoke with a touch of pride. He got up and went over to Edward. "Let me look at your books. Have you the works of the Marquis de Sade? I see you read Nietzsche. Tom Fielding is his greatest disciple. You must meet Tom Fielding in Liverpool. I will bring you together. He is like Julius Cæsar. He is the Julius Cæsar of the Cotton Markets of Liverpool. He is master of an amazing harem. A Casanova, he is a Casanova. He has an extraordinary control over women: they are helpless in his hands. They have no secrets from him. He is unequalled. A lord of individualists."

"You tell him all this, I suppose?" Edward smiled.

"I tell my friends everything, of course. But it is really important that you two should encounter. You are like Fielding in some ways, with your command of situations, your clear and cold intelligence, your power over the destinies of others. You are both statesmen: there is the same noble aloofness, the same unscrupulousness, the same relentlessness and massiveness of purpose. That magnificent breadth and weight of forehead that you have, for example — yes, you must meet. You must feast together in the same chamber of generous pleasure — you must — What is that little book? Raoul Root's poems? Do you cultivate that ingenuous American?

I meet him sometimes, but his circle is very tiresome. You would put them all to shame. They don't manage their poses properly, these Americans — they are too serious. One has always the sense of laborious and painful guarding against lapses. This Renaissance Revival — these Canzonetti and Risposte — no, it's not to my taste. But there are some beautiful girls in the circle, they wear Futurist dresses, they meet together in subterranean caves in the byways of London and dance astonishing Tangos."

"Evidently there is something to be said for the Renaissance cult."

"I'll introduce you." Welsh's face lit up. "Come back to London with me, and you shall meet the Prophet. And you shall meet the Divinity — you shall 'see the Goddess go.' When she walks she doesn't tread the ground. Oh, no — never, never!"

"What is her name?"

"Eunice Dinwiddie. But most of her American friends call her 'Eunus.' It is a great grief to her when it happens. And really it is an intolerable thing to happen, when you think of it. You'll realise that when you see her. She is breaking them in, gradually, to pronouncing her name in three syllables. But it takes time."

"Is she good-looking?"

"Yes. Too tall for my taste, but I have no fault to find with her figure. She droops in a rather

marked manner. She has admirable brown hair and brown eyes — not much complexion, but you don't expect that from an American. Her voice is carefully low and soft and modulated. She has taken infinite pains with it, and she really can make it tremble in exactly the right way at exactly the right moment."

"I should like to meet her." Edward rolled his last cigarette of the day. "I will certainly come up with you to London."

"You will, you will!" Welsh was capable of just as much excitement — no more and no less — in the small hours as at any other time. "I shall escort you. Reggie will be furious. And I prophesy — I prophesy, my friend, that you will make a conquest. You will conquer Raoul Root's circle. You will conquer the Divinity. You are born to set your heel wherever you will. You are wise, you are wicked, you are gay! I detect in you both Machiavel and Aristophanes: you derive from Socrates and from Puck! Yes, yes, come with me, my friend. I will guide your Cæsarean progress!"

Welsh had not called Edward "my friend" before, but Edward had known that it would come, and he was quite prepared for its coming, when it did come, twice. The man's way of talking was absurd, Edward reflected, his flattery too gross and grotesque to deceive a peacock: but undeniably he could carry it off, make it go. Yes, he could drag in a round dozen of famous names in a sentence, if he chose,

and the thing would pass. Well, of course, Welsh was an orator. He was an orator completely and perfectly; and it is rare enough to get hold of any one who is completely and perfectly anything. Edward had got hold of Welsh, and he did not mean to let him go. Nothing so unusual should be lightly dropped. And Edward was beginning to recognise that this gross flattery did after all affect him pleasantly. He liked being told, in Welsh's way, that he was this and that. But he would never make himself ridiculous by believing Welsh; there he vowed he would be firm.

"I am at your service," he said, "either for conquest or defeat. But now it's late and I want to go to bed. You stay of course as long as you like."

Welsh took his arm. "No," he replied, "I shall go to bed too. 'Allons, enfants de la patrie!' It will be a campaign," he shouted, "a *campaign!*"

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Edward came down the next morning he found that Welsh had been up for two or three hours. He chided him amicably for not having ordered and eaten breakfast, but his guest assured him that he was capable of going without food indefinitely at any time, and that a lonely meal was misery to him. So the two men sat down together at about ten o'clock. Edward was soon absorbed in a fried sole, peeling delicately the brown dry skin from the white flesh. "What do you think of *vers libres*, Welsh?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, you'll hear all about *vers libres* at Raoul Root's soirées. Not now: don't let's talk of them now."

They were silent again. Edward had expected Welsh to talk a great deal, he wondered why he didn't. Perhaps it was a sign of instinct, perhaps Welsh felt that his host had not the humour for talking at breakfast. After replying to Edward's question the lecturer went on with his bread-and-milk and said no more. It occurred to Edward that he would really like to live with Welsh, that in fact Welsh was the only person he had ever met that he would like to live with.

Tryers had not appeared. Edward was a little curious about him, but said nothing till breakfast was over. Then he asked Welsh what he thought had become of his brother-in-law.

"He may be at church," Welsh replied gravely. "Do you have weekday services at your church?"

"Why should he be at church?"

"Well, he succeeded in meeting your little Norah this morning. I saw them together walking along that path that goes through the field — near that red farm. So he has probably been let in for a strong sentimental reaction, and that would have driven him straight to the nearest church — yes, propelled him like a bullet through the door. I can see him kneeling in the pew of repentance — flapping his wings in the ecclesiastical bird cage."

"I'm sure there are no weekday services here," said Edward. "In fact I doubt if the church would be even open. The Vicar is 'Low': he would think it popish to worship on any day but Sunday."

"Ah, yes," Welsh branched off. "Think of the difference in the Catholic ideal. A church should be a familiar popular place; there should be no pews; the common people should use it as a daily thoroughfare. Churches should always be full of people in rags, very dirty people, very poor people. They should always be passing to and fro, kneeling for a little, resting for a little, making love for a little, sporting everywhere as much as they like. The only really religious countries are the countries where

peasants light their cigarettes at the altar-candles. Ah, they know what religion is in Spain! ”

“ Yes; but where do you think Tryers is, as he can’t be in church? ”

“ I can’t tell. No, my friend, upon my word, I can’t tell.” Welsh uttered these simple words with great emphasis and solemnity, as though they were charged with inordinate significance. It was a trick he had acquired unconsciously, Edward guessed, from speaking in public. So he used it whenever his thoughts wandered.

“ I thought of weekday services,” Welsh went on after a pause, “ because Reggie likes weekday services. He says they are more religious than the services on Sundays, and I think he is right. Only no services in the Church of England are religious. Anglicanism is the most irreligious sect that ever existed. Go to a Baptist Chapel, a Salvation Army meeting, there’s fire for you, there’s abandonment — real frenzy of belief. They know what religious experience is, bless their hearts! But Anglicanism is the creed of careful people who like what’s probable.” Welsh sighed heavily. “ Reggie will come back to lunch, at any rate. I never knew him not to come back to anybody else’s lunch. He is like a character out of Juvenal. Juvenal is the only author who could really have described Reggie. Perhaps Petronius Arbiter — ”

Edward laughed. “ Do you ever,” he asked, “ dislike him as much as he dislikes you? ”

"I don't know." Welsh got up from his chair as he spoke. "I can't tell." He began walking about the room. "I find it very difficult to analyse my feelings towards Reggie. I think what I really want is to fool him, to exercise my irony upon him. I mean that I want him to do things, to be placed in situations, that shall excite and gratify my sense of irony. I want to be passive all the while, you understand. Yes — that is really the use I have for Reggie. I want him to suffer, of course, in a certain way; but I don't want to bring his suffering about, directly and obviously. No, that would never do. Of course he could never understand what I want. He is extraordinarily crude; with his particular kind of energy he could hardly be anything else, but his very crudeness plays into my hands. I should be too lazy to deal with him if he wasn't crude. Of course he knows that I use him, he regards me as a kind of Torquemada of the spirit, but he fits it all into the mould of his mind, and he gets it all wrong. I'm not sure that I get it right myself. It's too much trouble. However —"

He broke off with a gesture that deprecated the idea of any one taking too much trouble about anything. Edward wondered how many conceptions this man caught at daily like gilded butterflies, and idly let escape forever on the moment. It was a curious case of energy that was always starting off and never going on. Welsh reminded him of a motor engine perpetually ejaculating explosively as

for progress, responsive that far, and that far only, to turns of the crank.

"Good Lord!" the subject of this simile exclaimed suddenly, "I forgot to put on any tie this morning." He had caught sight of himself in a mirror. "Will your servant mind?" he inquired apprehensively.

"Merrion is wonderfully tolerant. Nothing of that sort could agitate him. But I see George Forrest coming through the garden, and I know that he would be upset by your having no tie."

"I'll go to my room at once." Welsh lurched hurriedly to the door. "The man of influence! Good Lord!"

He was gone, and a minute or so later George appeared, looking extremely grave.

"What's the matter?" Edward asked him. "Was England invaded this morning before breakfast?"

George sat down. He did so earnestly and deliberately, as though he had planned the action beforehand with every due regard.

"This Mr. Tryers," he said, "has behaved in the most unpardonable, the most ungentlemanly way."

"You interest me, George." Edward raised himself a little in his chair. "It has always interested me, this question of what is gentlemanly and ungentlemanly."

"I am sure you will agree with me," George went

on, "that Mr. Tryers has not behaved like a gentleman."

"Well, well, let's hear all about it."

"He's been playing the cad with Norah Weekes!"

"Making love to her, do you mean?"

"Making love! Making love to a child like that! You can call it making love, if you like. I call it disgusting caddishness. I should have supposed that any man would call it that."

"Sorry you're so upset; but Tryers had my permission, you know."

"Your permission!" George raised his voice indignantly.

"Yes. I told him there would be no harm in his amusing himself with her, if he liked."

"Amusing himself!" George had a tedious habit of echoing his interlocutor when he was engaged on a moral protest.

"Within limits, of course. I assure you, George, I didn't give him leave to seduce the girl."

George gave an ethical snort.

"Of course I didn't mean *that*," Edward went on. "But he hasn't, has he? Surely not so early in the morning?"

"You are indecent." George spoke violently. "I'd better go, I think. Especially as it was you who put the man up to it."

"Up to what, George? Don't go. Stay and explain yourself."

George was walking round the room.

"That man," he at length observed, "is unfit for the society of decent people. You can't defend him, Raynes. You know you'd never do a thing of that sort yourself. You may say all kinds of horrible things, but you don't do them. Your bark —"

"Yes, yes, I know. But tell me what it is that I can't defend Tryers for doing and that I should never do myself."

"You know. Messing about with Norah — an innocent country girl. It's the most outrageous —"

"My dear fellow, your idealism is incurable. Have you ever remarked Norah's eyes? She's a match for Tryers any day of the week."

"Anyhow that's not the point. His caddishness is the point. He got up early this morning with a sketch-book — a sketch-book." George repeated the word with emphasised disgust. "He went out after her, pretended he wanted to make a sketch of her for a painting —"

"My idea, George, I'm afraid that was my idea."

"He tried to get her into a field — round into some corner or other where he couldn't be seen. He tried to put his arm round her and get her on his knee and kiss her, — and all that kind of thing."

"But really — I confess — if she were willing? Upon my word, I don't see — Cakes and ale, George, cakes and ale."

"No, but you don't understand. It was the kind of way he did it. He did it in a beastly kind of way.

He was leading up — innuendoes, you know. What right has he,” George exploded, “to come down here and try to pollute a young girl’s mind?”

“How did you come to hear all about it?”

“Norah told me. I could see at once she was telling the truth. She couldn’t have invented the things she told me that Tryers said. They were just the kind of things a blackguard like that would say.”

“Tell me, is this really all pure zeal for morality on your part? I shall begin to believe, you know, that you’re not indifferent to Norah.”

“Nonsense.” George reddened. “I have the same interest in her that I have in all the boys and girls of the neighbourhood. I feel that I have a certain responsibility. My position —”

He broke off, embarrassed. Edward fixed a contemplative eye on him, and said nothing.

“I very soon saw what kind of a person Tryers was,” George went on. “He was extremely agreeable to me during breakfast, agreeable in his nasty sleek sort of way —”

“‘Sleek!’ Moral indignation’s no excuse for conventional epithets. Tryers couldn’t be sleek.”

“Can’t think why you always trifle, Raynes.— Well, my aunt had a headache. She couldn’t come down, so we breakfasted alone. You know how it is with men of Tryers’ stamp. They think every other man must be as big a scoundrel as they are themselves. After a bit the fellow began talking to me in a way I didn’t at all like.”

"I wish I had been there!"

"It didn't take me long to realise that he was a cad. He must have seen that I disapproved, but he went on just the same. I gave him no encouragement, but he went on. He actually had the audacity to tell me of his meeting with Norah."

"Yes. How did he put it?" Edward's interest was quickened.

"Said that he had a fancy to sketch her, that she was a wonderfully pretty girl. A temptation to him — I think that was his phrase."

"Oh, yes — a temptation. Capital!"

"He said he nearly kissed her, but then he thought it wouldn't be fair. Damned hypocrite!"

"Why did he think it wouldn't be fair? Do tell me."

"Because, if you please," George's tone was bitterly contemptuous, "she was so fresh and untouched, and had never known real passion —"

"Capital! Capital! As if she could learn it from him at once. Tryers' vanity is always so amusing."

"Yes, that was practically what he said: that he wouldn't be the first to teach her. He had experienced so much, and she so little."

"I know that Don Juan pose of his."

"And he had the impertinence — just imagine it, Raynes — the gross impertinence to say that he gave her up for *me* — for *me*!"

Edward leant back in his chair and laughed un-

restrainedly. "That is splendid," he exclaimed. "I thoroughly appreciate that."

"I must confess I don't find it amusing," George observed coldly. "The more I think of it, the more it disgusts me. To make out that he had had the girl in his power, as it were, and had given her up, because he felt that it wouldn't be fair to me, that I was always here, that I ought to be the first. The liar! And the real truth was that he had done all he could to — to — er — excite her feelings in his repulsive way."

"Yes, I know." Edward was still laughing, silently now. "But don't you see, dear old George, how extremely entertaining it all is? Surely you must —"

"I don't." George was very decisive. "I have never been accused of lacking a sense of humour, but really I cannot say that I find anything to laugh at in such revolting meanness and hypocrisy and humbug. I do not consider that a liar and a blackguard is amusing. When I think of the things he said! Foh! That he was here to-day and gone to-morrow, and how selfish it would have been of him to have taken his pleasure, to have plucked the flower and — er — what did the blackguard say? — plucked the flower and left it fading. It makes me sick."

"Then you saw Norah later and she told you what had really happened?"

"Yes. I got rid of Tryers as soon as I could, you may be sure."

"Where did he go?"

"I don't know. He said something about going to bathe. I didn't care where he went," George added savagely.

"Well, what did Norah say?"

"Oh, she said — I happened to meet her just by her house — she said: '*You* wouldn't be up to any of those games of Mr. Tryers', would you?'"

"What had you done to make her say that?" Edward questioned severely.

"Oh, I — What do you mean? Naturally enough, I — I just put my hand on her shoulder or patted her cheek, or something of that kind. I really don't remember. It was the natural thing to do. I felt sorry for her."

"Of course. It was an occasion for sympathy."

"I've seen her about since she was practically a baby, you know. She's still quite a child to me."

"Exactly. Then she told you all about it?"

"Yes. I'm sure she was telling the truth. The man had frightened her. No doubt about that. The real truth of the matter was that she was repelled by him, violently repelled,— and no wonder! She would have nothing to do with him. Now do you see what a cad he has been? Talking to me as he did, telling such a pack of lies. Abominable meanness and crookedness, that's what I call it!"

"I saw yesterday that she didn't like him much."

"She knew instinctively the kind of —"

“Rot! He didn’t happen to please her, that was all.”

George sniffed. “That’s like you, Raynes,” he said. “You reduce everything to the lowest level. You don’t believe in purity or innocence. You explain them away. Thank God, I don’t feel like that.”

Edward smiled. “I believe that a girl objects to a man’s attentions if she’s not attracted to him, and doesn’t object if she is. That’s all. Quite a simple proposition. Not cynical in the least.”

“Norah was repelled because Tryers is a brute. Why, she didn’t even let him touch her hand.”

“Much to her credit. Have it your own way. Call him ‘the man Tryers.’ That will relieve you. And tell me more.”

“There’s nothing more to tell.”

“You comforted poor Norah a little, I hope? Told her that all men weren’t like that — made her fully realise you were quite different? It was a splendid opportunity.”

“Oh, well, I — I tried to make her feel easier in her mind, of course. I could hardly do anything else.”

“The girl is fond of you, George. Of course you know that?”

“I hope she is.” George seemed a little nettled.

“I am fond of her. No harm in that, is there?”

“None whatever. Quite as it should be.”

“I wish the child well. She is a good girl. I

hope to see her a happy wife and mother one of these days."

Edward groaned.

"I certainly do," George continued with some warmth. "I do *not* want to see her spoilt by the attentions of blackguards. Do you?" He challenged Edward.

"Tell me," Edward asked, "did she really give you details about Tryers' wicked conduct? That must have been exciting. Did she say, for example: 'He tried to kiss me. He tried to take me on his knee'? I should like to have heard her say that. I can just imagine how engagingly she would have said it. As Welsh would observe, 'what an occasion'! Was she very shy?"

"Of course she was shy. Any nice girl would have been shy."

"Not so shy as she seemed, I'll be bound. That makes it all the more attractive: just the right element of artificiality, of intrigue. Oh, my dear George, you miss so much!"

"I must go now." George rose. "I have a great deal to get through this morning. I came to you simply because I wanted to make it perfectly clear — perfectly clear — that I cannot, under any circumstances, meet this man again. I thought it best that you should understand my position, and the reasons for my position."

"That's all right, George. Don't mention it." Edward nodded pleasantly as George went.

CHAPTER X

AS soon as the front door had closed, Welsh emerged from his retirement above stairs. Entering the room, he ejaculated "Ha!" just as if he were on the stage, and at once went to the bookcase. Edward had taken up his newspaper, and proceeded to read it. There was silence undisturbed for about half an hour. Then Edward's man appeared with a telegram, which he handed to Welsh.

"Yes,—ah—my friend," Welsh addressed the servant, "there is an answer." He turned to Edward. "A Socialist Society in London wants me to lecture for them to-night on 'Art and Democracy.' Shall I accept? Would you come too?"

"Yes," said Edward without hesitation. "We'll go by the four train. That suit you?"

Welsh wrote out the reply telegram, and handed it to the servant. "Is that all right?" he asked him appealingly. "Anything to pay?" He took out a handful of gold, silver and copper.

"Nothing, sir," replied Merrion. "This is a prepaid form."

"Ah—" Welsh gave a sigh, and put the money back. "You have no conception, my friend," he added to Edward, "how I am worried by absurd

transactions of this kind. They prick me all over like little pins, every day. I suppose we shall have to take Reggie with us? Where is he?"

"He's in disgrace."

"Why? How?" Welsh raised his voice.

"He'll tell us all about it when he comes back. It will be more amusing for you to have it at first hand. It seems he is bathing just at present. Tell me more about this circle of Raoul Root's. We may meet some of them to-night, perhaps?"

"Oh, no!" Welsh was emphatic. "Oh, dear no. Not at a Socialist lecture. They take no interest in politics of any kind. They represent a reaction from Shaw and Wells and Chesterton, and all that lot. Social movements are quite out of their sphere. They hate the propagandist school."

"What? Back to the 'nineties — the aloofness of art — all that kind of thing?"

"Oh, they despise the 'nineties. The 'nineties haven't any chance at all. That is an obsolete period. All the nineteenth century is obsolete. It produced nothing but prettiness and bombast. I've heard them say that again and again. They are modern, my friend. They are the last word in modernity. They are *les jeunes*." Welsh's French accent was terrible.

"*Les seuls jeunes authentiques?*"

"What's that?" Welsh looked puzzled.

"Well," said Edward, "how do they make their art fit what's modern?"

Welsh hesitated. "They write poetry that reads like advertisements. Root says that everything should come in: bathroom fixtures should come in, motorbusses, Tube Stations, telephone wires,—everything. No rhymes, of course. No 'metro-nome rhythm.'"

"Futurists?"

"They criticise them. But I tell you there are precious few artists that Root's set think it worth while to criticise."

"I've read some of Root's verse. It gave me pleasure. Vigour, certainly. He annoyed me rather, though, by using a lot of absurd words."

"Oh, Root's verse!" Welsh's intonation was equivocal. "Yes, it's too much *work*. I believe he spent years of toil in the British Museum, studying the lesser Renaissance Italians. That gave him his start. Now it's the lavatory fixture, motor-bus, tea-shop vein. I don't read him. I don't like them in print, but it's amusing to hear them talk. They're all very casual, very off-hand,—damned rude, in fact, at times. I tell you what it is, my friend. They have a pedantic and hide-bound convention of naturalness. *Les jeunes* must be natural. And *les jeunes* must be clever and bright. Seriousness is nineteenth century: *les jeunes* are to inaugurate a new era of wit. Oh, how they keep the ball rolling! But I assure you they have no humour. It is all very naïve. They are deliciously simple. That is why I almost like them. Their vanity and credulity are re-

freshing. They will believe anything — anything — of one another."

"When will you take me?"

"Sunday. I'll telephone. You shall see the Divinity. Eunice Dinwiddie."

"Yes; a beautiful girl is a beautiful girl, whatever 'circle' she may belong to." Edward found this reflection agreeable.

"How I shall enjoy your discriminations when the affair is over!" Welsh lapped up his words in a cat-like way. "You won't be annoyed by their absurd arrogance, will you? They cultivate arrogance with German thoroughness and Transatlantic energy. They are tremendously naïve. They are much more agreeable and interesting than their work. You should see their official organ, *Crash*. The prose might be written by cheeky school boys, and the verse by homicidal maniacs. The verse! They throw words at you like misshapen bricks. They bang you with a phrase here and a phrase there. Nothing connected."

"But surely there was some woman. Five years ago or more — and five years ago must be the dead past for Root's set. Some woman in Paris who tried all this elliptical business on. I was under the impression that people very soon found out how easy a trick it was, and how little there was in it."

"You're right! You're right!" Welsh was in high glee. "Root takes up various 'stunts' and makes them go. He's an American. That's the

real clue to him. He'd be nowhere without his American training. You've hit it! You've hit it!"

Edward didn't feel that it was quite this that he had hit, but he did not interrupt Welsh.

"That's what Root does," the lecturer continued. "He follows in the tail of these little new movements. He's like a puppy dog on the end of a string!"

Edward was wondering how far Welsh had coloured the complexion and distorted the features of this newest of new circles of *les jeunes*. It was his way, of course, to colour and distort.

"What are you thinking?" Welsh asked abruptly, and Edward veraciously replied:

"I was wondering if you were giving me true impressions. You don't always, you know. But I'm inclined to believe that your judgment is singularly clear about people outside your own set, that you have the keenest eye for all their little foibles. You convince yourself all the more, you see, that way; convince yourself, I mean, that yours is *the* circle, that you and your friends are of the blood royal, and the others pretenders. Isn't that it?"

"Why of course mine is *the* circle!" Welsh opened his eyes. "Who could compare this Raoul Root with Tom Fielding or Willie O'Flaherty? You must meet O'Flaherty; he has real genius. The most delicate, the most imaginative, the most fastidious, the most distinguished spirit! I tell you, my friend, it is the most distinguished circle."

"And you," Edward twitted him, "the pivot of it all! The most distinguished of all positions in the most distinguished of all circles! I am envious, I tell you, my friend, I am envious. And here's Tryers," he added, looking out of the window.

"Ah!" Welsh collapsed.

"Tryers has an air of disparagement about him this morning," Edward went on.

"Ah," said Welsh again. "I wonder,"—he spoke curiously flatly—"I wonder what he'll tell us about his morning's adventure?"

CHAPTER XI

TRYERS had met the little girl, oh, yes — but the mood which had made him want to meet her had passed very quickly. He was more and more sure that that kind of mood was an enemy to him, and besides, its power was weakening, no doubt of that. He spoke, with calm and severe decision, of a great change impending.

“There is a change,” Edward got a word in at last, “a change of a slighter sort impending this afternoon. Welsh is to lecture to-night for some Socialists in London, and I am going with him.”

Tryers coloured. “I thought you had asked me to stay for the week-end,” he said huffily.

“So I did. But Welsh, you see, has taken your place as my guest, and Welsh wants to go.”

“I shall stay on at the Inn,” Tryers remarked after a pause. “I am very comfortable there, and your bathing is excellent. And I feel that I need the country air.” He spoke with a marked attempt at dignity.

“All right,” said Edward. “Use my boat, of course.”

It was an exasperating morning for Tryers. Welsh and Edward started a discussion about Rus-

sian authors, a discussion deliberately provoked, so Tryers thought, in order to ignore him. For a time he made petulant interruptions, and at last, finding it impossible to ruffle the equanimity of the critics, he abruptly took his leave.

Edward and Welsh looked at each other as the door shut.

"Gone just before lunch!" cried Welsh. "He must be very much annoyed."

"Of course one must remember," Edward spoke as though he were alluding to a very remote event, "that he was rebuffed this morning."

"Yes," Welsh agreed. "Norah. Evidently a serious rebuff. There were all the usual signs."

They fell again to talking of Tchekoff.

CHAPTER XII

EDWARD had begun to be affected by an unusual sense of anticipation. Something, he felt, was going to happen, something exciting and unprecedented. He laughed at himself, but he did not laugh himself out of his impression.

It was the case that is general with premonitions of the kind. For some time Edward, in unconscious rebellion against his derisive "control," had been growing towards a change, and the incidents of the last few hours had forced the growth. This was why he so readily felt that new experiences were hanging for him in mysterious air, this was why he purringly prepared himself to co-operate with destiny. But though he purred, he was roused. Welsh's influence played its part: his perpetual intimation of "something exciting! you will see, my friend!", his stimulating exclamation marks, had their effect in happy time. Edward let himself go, much more emotionally than was "in character" for him, towards the future. No one can ever be "in character" all the time: human nature is not adapted for a strain like that.

Anticipations beguiled Edward's journey in the train, they engaged him in the taxi-cab to the hotel, they interpolated themselves with unflagging liveli-

ness during his dinner with Welsh. They had to dine early as the lecture was for eight-fifteen, and Edward as a rule much disliked dining early. But he found that these anticipations of his reconciled him to a great deal of inconvenience; very fortunately reconciled him, for any one going about with Welsh had to put up with inconveniences at all turns. On this particular occasion Welsh had begun by packing his bag before Edward's man could get at it, and he had left all his collars behind in a drawer of his room. He had discovered the collars to be missing some ten minutes after the train had started, and the oversight had distressed him acutely. "I cannot possibly lecture in a flannel shirt," he repeated mournfully again and again, and Edward vainly assured him that a flannel shirt would be just what the Socialists would like. Then Edward offered some of his own collars, if they would fit: he asked Welsh what size he took, and Welsh hadn't, of course, the remotest idea. He fell to a lively discussion of the shape of Edward's neck and the various qualities thereby indicated: he compared the neck with those of various statues of Roman Emperors; Nero, of course, was prominent among them and occasioned several picturesque historical debouches: further comparisons followed in swift succession, Antinous and Apollo were invoked, and there was much talk of Hadrian. It was not till the train stopped at Three Bridges that Welsh was persuaded to apply himself to the practical test of putting on the collar

which Edward had taken out of his bag while one of the orations was in progress. The stiffness of the linen appalled the lecturer. "How can you wear them?" he cried. "What can be done with these button-holes?" Edward efficiently prised them open with a tiny blade of his knife, and Welsh received the collar from his hands with a look of helplessness complete and irremediable. He surveyed the collar as Sisyphus might have surveyed his stone. He let it drop on the floor. His companion picked it up and put it round his neck, Welsh grimacing horribly the while.

"No good," said Edward. "The collar is obviously at least two sizes too small. You would be strangled in it."

"Strangled!" Welsh repeated. "Strangled! What can be done?" He was alarmed.

At Victoria nothing could dissuade him from making fevered inquiries for collars at the Bookstalls and the Tobacco Stand: he asked advice, most deferentially, of a porter who was helpful to the extent of indicating a shop in Wilton Street. "Wilton Street!" Welsh echoed, as though that locality were a discovered refuge and protection forever. He went off post-haste, leaving Edward on the platform with the luggage. Edward, who felt like a subordinate character in a knockabout farce, walked up and down, smoking cigarettes and preserving his equanimity. It was something that Welsh, when he returned, actually had a parcel of collars. He was tri-

umphant, he felt sure he had something to fit, because he had bought several different sizes. This he explained carefully, as though anxious to convince his companion of his foresight and prudence.

Welsh was inconvenient, too, when they reached the hotel. Edward had asked him if he approved of their staying at "The Regent," and Welsh had enthusiastically agreed, saying that he liked the name, it reminded him of Bath and Beau Brummel, he was sure all the servants would wear powdered wigs and have an eighteenth-century manner. But when they arrived, panic seized him. The place, he said, was "too formidable," he would be "terrified of the officials," he was "sure they would suspect him of something." Couldn't they go to some little inn in Gower Street, or perhaps turn back to the Vauxhall Bridge Road, where he had once taken a bedroom, and though he had forgotten the number, he thought he knew more or less where it was. However Edward was firm, he reminded Welsh of that pregnant line of Swinburne,

"Bugs hath she brought from London beds," and clinched the matter by getting out of the cab and signalling to the hotel porter to take the luggage. Welsh followed piteously, more than usually bowed, quite crumpled, in fact. "Do not abuse me, I beg," his aspect implied, "you see I'm humbled to the dust." Edward took him into consideration later on by securing a table in the most obscure and secluded corner of the dining-room.

CHAPTER XIII

THEY arrived at the lecture hall about fifteen minutes late. People were there in full muster, giving a partial attention to the chairman who was trying to beguile their impatience by announcements and preliminary remarks.

"Comrade Wimpole," he was saying in defiant tones, as Edward and Welsh came in, "Comrade Arthur Wimpole, who has been doing such magnificent work in Leicester — magnificent work — I'm sure you are all aware —"

At that moment the audience saw Welsh, and cut the chairman's remarks short by a burst of cheering, which increased in volume as the lecturer walked down the side of the hall. Edward slipped into a corner seat, and Welsh pursued his course swiftly towards the platform. Male members of the audience began to shout and stamp their feet, while the women clapped their hands energetically.

The chairman raised his arm. "Friends!" he shouted, "Fellow Workers! Here is Comrade Welsh among us again."

Opportunely Welsh appeared on the platform, still in his overcoat, which hung about him, unbuttoned, like a black mantle, giving him a Mephistophelian

appearance. The applause, which had subsided for a moment, redoubled. The chairman stood waiting, with a thin forced smile on his countenance. His eyes remained grave. He was a little man called Routh, very spare, very pale, very wiry; clean shaven, with short grey stubbly hair. He had a withered look as though he had been long since drained dry of natural sap. All joy of life, it would seem, had deserted him in his infancy. His expression indicated, more than anything else, determined hostility, and each line of his face gave the impression of not having come there by nature, but of having been drawn by his own obstinate will. "A savage little white man who wants to bite something," was Edward's comment. Soon he began to shout again.

"You don't expect formalities from *me!*" he cried. (As much as to say: "If you do, damn you, I'll have you all shot.") "This is no bread-and-butter drawing-room meeting. It is a meeting of men and women—men and women." His emphasis was ferocious: Edward saw the sexes stark and bleak. "And we," the speaker continued, "have adopted the only sane, the only just creed that men and women of to-day are able to adopt. We are Socialists." He stopped, evidently expecting applause at this point, but the audience failed him.

One man cried "Agreed!" in a terse discouraging tone. Edward looked up: the man was in the front row of the gallery to the side: he was leaning heavily

over the railing with lank arms dropped and hands clasped tightly together. He was middle-aged and consumptive-looking, with a ragged brownish beard; altogether, Edward thought, one of the most depressing people he had ever seen, the kind of person to chill any enthusiasm at any moment. His next door neighbour was a girl, and when Edward's glance had shifted to her, it did not shift again for some time. She was certainly most incongruously juxtaposed, and evidently she was bent, in self-defence, on emphasising the incongruity. How did she manage it, Edward wondered, how did she contrive that physical atmosphere of aloofness, how was it that she proclaimed so unmistakably yet with so aptly moderated, so finely judged a tone of demeanour, that she was not of these others, that she was there from motives far beyond any grasp of theirs? "Some one will understand," she seemed to say, "some one will understand."

The chairman went on talking, and Edward caught words here and there:

"— the great regeneration — the promised land — the principles on which we rest secure — confident of ultimate victory — advancing by leaps and bounds —"

The audience was growing impatient. Welsh sat on a chair at the back of the platform, his head in his hands; he remained motionless, and Edward wondered if he had fallen asleep. How delicately that girl inclined her body forward! It was really a no-

table curve, a tense and considered droop, one might say. . . .

“Comrade Welsh!” the chairman turned upon the lecturer, who started and held up a hand as though to ward off an unexpected blow. “Comrade Welsh! We welcome you. You come to-night to speak to us in the name of Democracy, on ‘Art and Democracy’.”

He sat down suddenly, and Welsh moved to the front of the platform, talking as he moved.

“Ladies and gentlemen, if you will pardon me the expression —”

The audience had expected a moment’s interval for applause. Welsh had taken them by surprise, but they were not to be cheated out of their demonstration.

“I am glad,” he went on, when the shouting and clapping were nearly over, “I am glad that you do pardon me. I can assure you, my friends, my brothers and sisters, my comrades, if I may use that characteristically humorous and whimsical phrase of our chairman —”

Comrade Routh’s back stiffened. He glanced suspiciously at Welsh. There was some laughter, and one angry female voice cried shrilly: “Shame! shame!”

“I can assure you,” Welsh continued, “that in all my goings about,—in England, in Germany, in America,—I can assure you that I have seen *no* ladies, but these sitting here before me to-night with

their tawdry trinkets and their shabby clothes."

Was he mad? thought Edward. To begin with the implication that they were really the scum of the earth, but he preferred them to ladies! Edward looked at the women's faces: some seemed to hint at resentment, but all were interested.

"As for 'shame,'" Welsh uttered the word with infinite contempt, "we all heard just now, in flute-like female accents, that syllable pronounced." ("The woman will kill him," thought Edward.) "But I have no shame. I — and you, my friends, — and you, — are without shame. We stand up shameless before our Gods. Why cry 'Shame, shame!' where there is no shame? It is a wonderful thought, an inspiring thought, a thought that will carry us far, a thought that is, as the Americans say, 'worth while,' — that here, in this remarkable hall, in this district of Bayswater, there are gathered together more than five hundred people, all of whom are totally destitute of shame."

Edward looked up again at the girl in the gallery. Her lips were slightly parted, her expression more enigmatical than ever. As he looked, her lips moved hardly perceptibly, like petals just stirred by the ghost of a breeze on a day almost windless, in the most secluded corner of the most secluded of gardens. "I know:" she seemed to intimate. "This is a cipher that I can read. I and I only was born to read it."

"If we have shame," Welsh went on, with a

dominant sweeping gesture that banished shame forever to the barbarians, "if we have shame, we can neither be artists nor democrats. There are some, I know, who call themselves artists, who will talk to you of 'proper shame,' who will enunciate reverentially the word 'aidōs,' by which they mean the morbid and craven fear that barred the approach of the artist to Life, in unregenerate days. Here, my friends,"—his speech quickened, he began to talk more violently and with more conviction—"here I would indicate to you the nature of the great revolution which democracy is making for art. The artist of the future—and, of course the future is the People's, the whole People's, and nothing but the People's—"

Comrade Routh's pale eyes glistened. He half rose, and began clapping his hands viciously together. The audience followed his lead at once: one earnest young man sitting near Edward, dressed in shiny black, looking as though he belonged to the Salvation Army,—pasty-faced, pimpled, blonde-moustach'd,—shouted: "Down with the parasites!" and for a time everything was in an uproar. Edward was annoyed. Why had Welsh brought this about? He must have known.—There was the girl in the gallery, drooping a little more under such vulgar pressure of noise, giving her pained rebuff to these gross activities in progress. A rude wind had unpardonably found its way to her garden, she—Edward pulled up his reflections short.

“ Good Lord! ” he said to himself, “ I must really be careful. ”— But why on earth had Welsh invoked that brutal demonstration? Edward did not realise the pressure that an audience brings to bear upon a speaker, he did not know that an orator, particularly an orator like Welsh, cannot keep himself from saying the kind of things that his people want him to say.

“ Your democratic artist, ” Welsh was able to continue at last, “ your democratic artist spits out all the old shibboleths — spits them out, if need be, into the very faces of their High Priests. ” Comrade Routh looked as though he were about to spit himself, for illustration. “ We of the new heaven and the new earth will speak how we will, and of what we will. Art, with the new inspiration of Democracy, will tamper with every forbidden thing. The need of the People is revelation! Every corner must be revealed by the artist, the avenger of the mob, the artist who shall be Lucifer bringer of light, Lucifer son of the morning! ”

He threw his head back with a fine gesture of pride and defiance. The audience kept quiet, too much subdued by him now to applaud.

“ It is the artist, the artist, who shall make the great exposure. There is nothing that shall not be spoken. These well-protected ones, they have their secrets, they live on their secrets, but we will tear their secrets out of their very bowels. The world shall know what shelters them, what feeds them and

what gives them drink. The world shall hear of it! Hear of *what?* — Of men and women starved and worked to death, of children ravished. Yes, we shall know the lies of religion and morality, we shall know the sanctified indecencies of marriage, the consecrated cruelties of that property-lust by which marriage was begotten! And some will cry ‘Shame! Shame!’ But we shall not be brought to silence.”

As Welsh spoke, Edward observed the faces in the audience. Nearly all were emotionally stirred, and the experience seemed to bear some down below their usual level, to raise others above it. The former class wore a look of dull sensuality, a look of limp and flaccid lust unredeemed by ecstasy; it seemed that they were wallowing and gorging. The latter, young men and girls for the most part, were genuinely kindled, keyed to a more clearly-toned, more vibrant emotional pitch. Their faces showed heightened expression. Certain others, of middle and past middle age, underwent a pseudo-excitement: they enjoyed their elderly little thrills, but they could not surrender to them. They shook their heads and pursed their lips and smiled in a deprecating way, they threw their soft shapeless sops to the proprieties. Meanwhile the girl in the gallery preserved her demeanour, peculiarly individual, untainted by any example. Her droop varied a little, her lips opened a little more or a little less, but her air of sovereign withdrawal was not diminished. She kept

that closed look, that veiled intimation of a higher appreciation of what Welsh was saying; she was still of that spiritual order which divides itself from those of the lesser disciples. Who could she be? Edward's interest in her positively caused him an uneasy blush. Even the eloquence of Welsh and the varied reactions of that eloquence upon the audience could not keep his mind from this girl. The orator's voice kept beating against the outer doors of his consciousness. But none the less he found himself, at intervals, gauging Welsh's character as a speaker, gauging, too, without any marked abatement of the satisfaction that criticism usually gave him.

He noticed that Welsh was subject to extraordinary lapses, lapses that became more and more flagrant and frequent as he established his hold over his people. First he hypnotised them by incantations of some genuine power; then he would reel off clap-trap, launch joyously into bombast, strike out shamelessly for naked melodrama. Suddenly all this would bore him, and he would say something that really interested him; phrasing it with such audacity, giving it such an edge that his hearers started as though the edge had cut their flesh. His wit helped him too. He was speaking of St. Paul—"the aristocrat of aristocrats, but no philosopher."

"Sir!" an intent young mechanic jumped to his feet, flourishing his note-book, "you told us before that Paul *was* a philosopher!"

Welsh regarded the interruptor with deprecating sweetness. He replied, delicately remonstrant: "Oh, sir! We call him a philosopher in Bayswater."

He spoke of the peculiar academic snobbishness of literary gentlemen, of how they buried themselves under the fallen leaves of this tradition or that, ashamed to show their own actual contours more than was conventionally decent, so in the end losing the sense of themselves entirely. Then he attacked the too conscious reactions against tradition; he indicated Raoul Root and his following. Socialism, he said, would change all this to the great benefit of art. Through Socialism we would reach to the best Individualism. Welsh summarised, rapidly and with great vigour, Oscar Wilde's Essay on "The Soul of Man under Socialism." "But this is all right," thought Edward. "I don't suppose any of them have read it."

Welsh spoke admirably, too, when he put art into its place for Socialists. "The artist refines our perceptions, and even Socialists need some refinement." He dashed out, genuinely stirred again now, to an ardent offensive that made Comrade Routh wriggle in his chair. He attacked "the hide-bound conventions of the Progressive,"—in particular the convention of community of feeling, the convention that "we must all fall in comradeship on one another's necks." "I have a right to choose," he declared, "the people on whose necks I am to fall. I see

some here before me to-night whom I would willingly embrace: I see others whom I would not of my free choice even touch — no, not even the tips of their fingers with the tips of mine!”

This announcement caused a great sensation and some embarrassment: many of the women looked conscious. The girl in the gallery, by a fugitive glance round her, and a slight modification of her curve, implied that she felt eminently with Welsh, but that the quality of her feeling was more fastidious. She would embrace, it seemed, but one to Welsh's three — no more.

“No,” Welsh continued, “we must have reserve, we must have taste — selection by taste. Deny taste, you deny freedom.”

The attack persisted. That partial and specialised apprehension of so many of our “Comrades,” their inability to co-ordinate all the phases of life,—there was actual tyranny in that, and promise of a tyranny more oppressive. Welsh went on to speak of the limitations of the proletariat, and Edward listened to a paraphrase, at length, of his own words on that subject, with recognition of him as “the most intransigent living individualist.” Then the orator undertook a definition of what humanity and humanism really meant; suddenly, to Edward's amazement, he swept irresistibly down to the lower level of his hearers, he fell torrentially in a tropical shower of balderdash. “Beat not the bones of the buried: while he lived, he was a man.” It was this

quotation that started Welsh off. "He may have been the veriest scoundrel, he may have been a blinking idiot, an owl, a zany, a doddipoll; a liar, a thief, a ravisher, a murderer, an abomination of desolation, bathed in the mire of the bottomless pit, stinking from hell to heaven,—what matter? Let us recognise the essential honourableness of flesh and blood as flesh and blood. Let us approach him not only with tolerance, not only with affection, but with reverence,—yes, my friends, I say with reverence, for he is *human*. 'Beat not the bones of the buried: while he lived, he was a man.' "

Edward's gaze was fixed on the girl in the gallery. She betrayed nothing. Her hints of herself were growing more and more obscure. She was enigmatical, all over. "Absurd!" Edward murmured. "I don't believe there is any enigma about it. She's a woman, very much a woman, and that is her way." But he could not dismiss her.

Welsh went on in this vein, with eulogistic tirades about publicans and harlots, "the outcast and despised, who are the chosen of Christ, and of all the Christs of the world." The limitations of the proletariat were quite forgotten. Edward observed that a look of bewilderment descended upon the more intelligent faces, while the unintelligent stressed their heavy sensual aspect. But at least the man was varied: if the lecture were more even, if there were no lapses, would it, Edward wondered, be so remarkable? Welsh certainly was born an orator:

he had, it seemed by nature, all the devices of the art. Impossible to believe that he had ever studied them. No speech that Edward had ever heard had been so authentically stamped impromptu. What fascination there was in that! in knowing that anything might come next, that everything depended on chance, on the look of a face in the audience, the reflection of the gas on a certain spot, the floating recollections of Welsh's mind, the digestion of Welsh's bread-and-milk! Yes, the man was amazing. What if he could make him drunk? He would very much like to hear a drunken Jack Welsh talk. That was an idea. But how much more he would like to listen to that girl up there! How still she was! For the last ten minutes she had sat without the change of a curve, without the movement of a feature.

Welsh was evidently winding up. He did not do it so well as Edward expected; he took too long, he got himself into twisted paths and could not find the right turning. Evidently he was rather exhausted. Edward reflected that perorations were not likely to come by nature. A pity, perhaps, that Welsh did not make a rough draft of what was to come right at the end. But he never would do that. At last, in a desperation for which he drew renewed energy, the lecturer plunged to his goal. He broke off abruptly, sprang straight into his thickets and through them.

"My friends! I have finished. My friends!

we have done with words. I leave you to thought, I leave you to action. And when I say action I mean rebellion, I mean revolution!" Interruption by perfunctory applause. "Remember! Beyond the old governments, beyond Oligarchy and Monarchy and Plutocracy, beyond these is the government of the People, the government called Democracy, never yet tried; yes, I say we have not tried it yet. With Democracy comes Socialism: but beyond Socialism is Anarchy, and beyond Anarchy is Anarchy again, and yet again Anarchy! Anarchy, my brothers, this is my last word to you — Anarchy! Anarchy!"

Edward put on his hat, took his stick, and looked for the hundredth time to that especial corner of the gallery. She was gone! He dashed for the nearest door. As he made his way through the crowd he was conscious of a flutter as of a bird imprisoned in his stomach. It was an unfamiliar sensation. The flutter ceased, and he experienced a shamed inward feeling, like a blushing of the bowels. Standing just outside the main entrance of the Hall, he looked eagerly about: face after face passed, but never the girl's. Yet the gallery people went this way: he had noticed the lank consumptive, looking sourer than ever, and she had been his neighbour. Perhaps she had found another way. That would be like her, to find another way; that was, no doubt, what she was always doing. Edward shot a last searching glance over the crowd, then hurried off

to discover another exit. He walked round the building: there were two other doors, but both of them shut. Perhaps they had opened for her, just for a moment! He found himself back at the main entrance. The crowd was passing more slowly now: evidently not many were left. No; he could see them all, and there at the end was Welsh, waving his hat.

CHAPTER XIV

TIME began to pass slowly for Edward. He said nothing to Welsh of the gallery girl, but he questioned him on his opinions about the passion of love. Welsh replied that he had never been in love, that he did not think he ever could be. "I am without love," he said, "as I am without tears. I cannot weep: I cannot adore. I am incapable of true sorrow, and of true religion." He warmed at this point, comparing himself with Turgenev's Dmitri Rudin. "A man without heart!" he exclaimed. "Can you conceive it? That is my destiny. But you, my friend, you are a lover. It is your fate to love. What a lover you would make! You would surrender, how slowly! but you would surrender altogether. Your devotion would be extraordinary. Yes, I have never met any one so capable of the grand passion as you. I wish I could see you in love."

"We're quits," said Edward. "I was wishing last night that I could see you drunk." But Welsh's words had their influence, at that time.

Early in the morning had come a telegram from Tryers, asking Welsh to send certain architectural instruments from his office to an address in Paris. Tryers was evidently on his way over, the telegram had been handed in the night before at Newhaven.

"We cannot escape from him," said Welsh wearily, dropping the yellow envelope on the floor. He was struck suddenly by the formidable nature of the task imposed. "I can't do it!" he cried. "I simply can't do it! How can I ever make up a parcel and send it to Paris? It is most annoying of Reggie. He knows quite well how agitating this kind of thing is to me — always. It *always* is. He did it all on purpose, I'm sure he did."

"Perhaps," suggested Edward, "he simply wanted us to know that he was quite happily off for Paris."

"If only," Welsh went on, "I could ignore that telegram. But I can't. He knows I can't. I am incapable of that kind of unscrupulousness. It is what I envy most of all in other people. Now *you*, I suppose, could throw that telegram away and never think of it again. How I wish I could do that! But I should be worried over those instruments all day. They would torment me!"

Edward rose. "Come with me to the office," he said. "A walk to Kensington won't be disagreeable. I undertake to get the parcel off."

Welsh was overcome with his usual gratitude. Again Edward stood forth a master. But the lecturer, during the full length of their walk to the office, was far from being really reassured. Nothing could take his mind off those instruments and the appalling difficulties surrounding them. Suppose they could not be found? Suppose the woman who had

the office key should be out? What if they could not turn the lock with the key? "I find it extremely difficult sometimes to turn keys in locks," Welsh complained. Then should they register the parcel? Should they insure it? And if so, for how much? Should they send it by special delivery? There was a special delivery system in America, but Welsh was not sure if one existed in England. It was all most baffling, most difficult. Impossible, he thought, to carry through everything successfully, when there was so much of it. Again he reverted to his conviction that this was one of Tryers' malevolent tricks. What could Reggie want with his instruments in Paris? In Paris! It was pleasure and nothing else that took him there. Absurd to suppose that he wanted to take measurements in the Louvre or the Madeleine! Was Edward sure he could make up that parcel safely, really safely?

Edward meant to take the instruments round to one of the smaller shops, and have them put into a parcel there, but he refrained from telling Welsh of his intention. There would certainly have been an assault of fresh fears. And after all they found on arrival that the woman who kept Tryers' key had a more recent telegram, sent from Dieppe. In it Tryers had told her to say that the instruments were not required. "Just as I thought," cried Welsh, "he did it on purpose! It was all a trick." But he hugged his relief visibly.

"I was right, I think," Edward remarked.

"Tryers wanted to show us that he was in for a gay time. We might go to London. No matter. He would cavoort to Paris, and do us in the eye."

"Oh, really. You don't say so. How extraordinary. That is most interesting." Edward conjectured that Welsh always replied in this way when he was paying no attention. He had perhaps acquired the habit in self-defence, from years of experience of voluble ladies who "went for" him when he was tired from lecturing. "How extraordinary," he repeated.

They walked back slowly and in silence down Kensington High Street. Welsh had suddenly become preoccupied. He grimaced as he walked; passers-by stared at him. The sun shone encouragingly and reminded Edward that a bottle of ale was pleasant. In the middle of a walk on a sunny morning what could be more to the point than a bottle of ale? He would bring Welsh's mind to the idea.

"I was once at the Rose and Crown," he broke the silence. "At Wimbledon. Swinburne came in, and they brought him a bottle of ale. He poured it out very slowly and carefully and held it up to catch the sunlight. The colour was beautiful. He sat admiring the colour and moving the glass here and there to catch different effects of light. He gave little grunts of pleasure all the while. The sun is shining now, and I want to drink ale."

"Drink ale?" Welsh waved his hand vaguely. "Can you do that here?"

“Certainly. There is a place on the other side of the street. A very proper place to drink ale. Come along.”

Welsh followed, rather bewildered. “Did you really see Swinburne? What did he talk about? Did you get him to recite any of his poems?”

“‘O daughters of dreams and of stories,
That life is not wearied of yet,
Faustine, Fragoletta, Dolores —’”

Edward could have wished that Welsh had discarded his silent abstraction rather more discreetly. The lecturer recited the lines in a loud voice, with gestures, pronouncing the names with a relish that lingered on every syllable; and they were in the very middle of the crowded street.

“Look out!” cried Edward. “I see a policeman.” Welsh was silent at once.

“As a matter of fact,” Edward went on, “the only remark that Swinburne addressed to me was ‘Much obliged.’ He had difficulty in getting on his overcoat, and I helped him.”

Edward delighted in his ale, but Welsh was prevented by his unfortunate stomach from touching a drop. The sight of a telephone reminded Edward of their project for the following evening.

“Have you telephoned to Raoul Root?” he asked idly.

Welsh scrambled to his feet. “No. Of course I must telephone. I learnt how to telephone in

America," he added with pride. "And Root is always in in the morning. This is quite the right time." He made his way to the instrument.

Edward half regretted that he had raised the subject. Since last night he had lost interest in the idea of Raoul Root and *les jeunes*. Why should he go and mix up with a crew of *poseurs*? He knew beforehand just the kind of pseudo-originality that they made a cult of. This Eunice Dinwiddie, too, she was probably very dull. One out of the hundreds and thousands of good-looking American girls who take up with art for the hackneyed ends of sex. And then Raoul Root, the smart Yankee who ran the show! It was really waste of time. Why hadn't he let it drop? Welsh would probably have forgotten all about it. One great advantage about Welsh —

Meanwhile the lecturer's voice at the telephone could be heard in the furthest alcove of the bar-room. It was as though he talked across an abyss.

"I want — to speak — to Mr. Raoul Root! Yes! Mr. Root! — To-morrow night! — Nine o'clock? Yes! — I am bringing a friend! — A friend! — Mr. Edward Raynes! — Oh? Yes, I know where it is! — Down Street! Oh yes!"

He came back radiant. "See what I can do!" he conveyed. "Splendid!" he actually said. "They'll all be there, because the meeting's at Mrs. van Spless's. She has the best house, the best food, and the best drink. Raoul Root is sure to take any

number of liqueurs. When he's drunk, he's ever so much more amusing. Oh, he'll be at his very best! Then the Divinity — she will certainly be there. She is Mrs. van Spless's intimate friend. Oh, do you know, the Divinity actually came to my lecture last night. I never told you. I was amazed, simply amazed. Yes, she was there in a corner of the gallery."

Edward thrilled and grew cold; then he felt his blood.

"Oh, indeed," he replied, keeping guard. "I thought you said she was quite sure not to be there."

"But she was!" Welsh spoke triumphantly. "She amazingly was!"

"Don't talk like Henry James," Edward diverted the issue. "Let's hold all that in reserve for to-morrow night."

"Oh, they patronise Henry James." Welsh was easily drawn off. "You wait and see how they talk of him."

Edward was silent. He finished his ale with what was for him precipitancy. His restlessness, checked for a time, was now almost intolerably aggravated. How could he wait till to-morrow evening? Certainly he couldn't drift about till then with Welsh. He would much rather be alone. Or he might hunt up some of the men at his club and gamble with them. But he wanted to be fresh for to-morrow. A long walk, perhaps. Yes, that would be better. He

would take a train into the country, and then he would walk.

Welsh played into his hands. "I think," he said, "I will go and see Willie O'Flaherty. I haven't heard from him for weeks. He may be annoyed with me. I should like to go and propitiate him. He lives in Chiswick, and you can get a 'bus straight from here. Will you come?"

"Not to-day. The fact is, I have a propitiation to accomplish on my own account. I must take the train to Richmond."

"To Richmond? Why not to Twickenham? Our greatest living poet is in Twickenham. He is a Polish Jew, eighty-three years old. The most magnificent head I've ever seen. I'll go with you. How I should like to see you two together! What a sensation! — Some other time? — Well, yes, I suppose some other time would serve. Under the conditions — things being as they are — yes. But you must meet the old man. We call him 'the old man.' The Rhadamanthus of the circle! — Richmond! So you go to Richmond! What associations does one have with Richmond? Georgian? Yes, a certain Georgian air. Perhaps a certain reminiscence of Watteau? Streams, trees, delicate figures, elegance, lace, muslins, indolence, *fêtes galantes*, *fêtes champêtres*! I hope Richmond will please you.—This is my 'bus. Do I change at Hammersmith? I wonder. I wish I knew. However —"

He stepped in with flamboyant courage, waving perilously to Edward, unaware of the conductor's remonstrances. Edward turned, and started to walk quickly off in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XV

NO doubt of it, Edward was upset. It was an unprecedented day for him. He smoked about twice as many cigarettes as usual, and he often lacked patience to roll them himself. His luncheon hour passed unnoticed; it was after three o'clock when he found himself opposite one of the Richmond hotels. There they gave him some warmed up soup, which he ate without tasting. Then he lit a cigarette, although he had not smoked between courses since Cambridge days. The meat that followed he played with for awhile. He lit another cigarette, called hastily for his bill, paid it and went out. Once in the street he was assailed by violent thirst. He made for another hotel: nothing could have persuaded him to return to the first; the idea of the place filled him with extreme repugnance. At the new hotel he drank ale and porter mixed — a full bottle of each — and he fell asleep over an old Sunday paper of which he had read perhaps three lines. He woke with a touch of indigestion; he swore he would walk at least five miles and do that five miles in an hour. He took the road back to London. As he walked, one thought after another sprang up at him out of ambush, as worrying

as sportive puppies that want to try their teeth.

Why did he behave like this? Was it a breakdown of his whole scheme? What did he suppose would come of it? Why could he not formulate to himself what it was that he wanted? How stupid to let himself strike out in this futile way in the dark! If you really do want to go and get married, you fool, why not say so and set about it? But remember that you have wanted definitely enough not to be married for at least ten years: set that against this vague impulse that dates from yesterday evening.— But what if I'm tired of being a bachelor? — Consider that it won't take very long for you to be much more tired of being married. You are thirty-five, you won't like changing your habits, you won't like having to do this and that because you're a married man. Haven't you been comfortable and at ease as you were, haven't you got a great deal out of life, haven't you been, as things go, happy? Then why, *why* . . .?

Then again: But this is something new, don't you understand, something perfectly new? Think of intimacy with that girl, the intimacy of marriage! Think of what I could say to her, of what she might say to me. What new lights, what revelations! — Now you are talking like Jack Welsh, that shows you're off your balance. — It is true all the same. You wouldn't surely have me miss this; why, it would be worth any sacrifice. And my former life hasn't the same hold over me; the fact is I'm begin-

ning to cease to react to it. You forget that I'm flexible, I'm not a slave of habit. Hang it all, I'm not middle-aged yet. A man's young till he's forty. Granted that I've done the right thing in staying single till now, that doesn't mean I oughtn't ever to marry. Look at the kind of people who are bachelors late in life. — But you wouldn't be like them. — Perhaps not, but it would be dull, I'm sure it would be dull. One stops reacting to the old experiences, that's why things get dull.

He kept repeating this to himself. The idea assailed his brain like an engine of siege. After a time he walked on without reflecting at all. Images of the girl in the gallery came to him at intervals: he saw vividly the arrangement of her brown hair over her forehead, her peculiar pout, her underlip drawn in, the poise of her head, her veiled glance, the droop of her body that seemed so well to express her spirit — but how much was unexpressed! What infinite exploration for a lover! He could not be deceived there. Former reflections began again, and took their course, much as before.

He walked for more than an hour. At about seven o'clock he happened on a taxi-cab which he took, telling the man to drive to his hotel. When he sat down he was tired, and soon he was hungry as well. — Scarcely any lunch, and no tea: a combination of abstinences not experienced since school days. — He began to enjoy the drive. Yes, this rapid motion was what he wanted. He lit a ciga-

rette. How delicious Virginian cigarettes were when you had had nothing to eat for some time! Certainly he felt more like himself now. He determined to dine carefully at the Café Boule. He would get the man to drive there first, he would order his dinner, then he would go on to the hotel, have a wash, dress perhaps, — was he too hungry to wait for dressing? Well, he could settle that later — and then walk or drive back to the Café. By that time his dinner would be beautifully ready. They knew him at the Café Boule; yes, they could be trusted there. There would be great comfort in that dinner. “How about your dinners when you are married?” He did not pursue the reflection.

Edward planned his meal. Simple material; soup, sole, steak, asparagus, peas, potatoes, fruit: but their treatment, that was the point of study. The genius of Russia should be invoked, he decided, for the soup, that of France for the sole, and the steak should be worthy of Boston or New York. Edward had never taken kindly to the general idea of the United States, but it seemed that they understood steak over there. For the arrangement of the vegetables and the fruit he would return to Paris: Paris would not fail him, nor would Bordeaux. Yes, he would take his especial Château; no vintage could be more delicate, more true, — *bien éloigné de toutes les fautes*. It lacked nothing, that wine, it had everything, but no single quality in excess. The bouquet alone should convince any one.

CHAPTER XVI

THE dinner was ordered with the smoothest expedition: they understood perfectly, and Edward, with a sense of being refreshed already, arrived at the hotel. He went straight to his bedroom. As he turned the key he heard through the next door Welsh's voice raised in familiar ineffectual protest. "But really, my dear Reggie!"

So Tryers had come back. But that was no reason why Edward should not wash himself and change his clothes. He would dress, he decided. His dressing would give just the right interval for the preparation of his dinner. It would be annoying to be kept waiting. He was ready in less than half an hour; his appetite lent him more despatch than usual. Surprising, how calm and normal he was now!

Should he go to the Café at once without troubling about Tryers and Welsh? They were still talking. It was Tryers' voice that was raised now. Excited, evidently. Well, he might as well go in. But only for five minutes. The soup must be kept in mind.

He found Welsh sprawling in a chair, and Tryers stepping hither and thither nimbly about the room. Welsh was looking on as though at the antics of an organ-grinder's monkey.

"You simply can't understand!" cried Tryers with virulent impatience. "Of course you never will understand!" He turned to Edward. "Ah," he said gravely, "I'm glad you have come."

"Only for five minutes. I have to go and dine almost at once."

"I'll come with you!" Tryers was eager. "I want dinner."

"Sorry. I'm invited to dinner."

Edward lied with the aplomb usual to him when his comfort was in hazard. Tryers' face fell. Welsh was still watching as though his brother-in-law were a performer.

"Tell me quickly," Edward went on. "What have you been up to? Why this trip over to Dieppe and then back again in the twinkling of an eye?"

Tryers looked a little disconcerted: Welsh's eyes twinkled. There was a pause. Tryers circled to the door, and then turned abruptly.

"I don't care." He drew his lips tightly together. "I am quite prepared for ridicule. What has happened," he continued fiercely, "is that I am changed. My whole life will follow another plan, — now."

"He's going over to Australia to build churches — fancy that!" Welsh was delighted. "He was off to Paris on pleasure, and then he was converted on the night-boat, on his way across! Isn't that exciting, Mr. Raynes? What do you think?"

Edward's face did not change. "My dear fel-

low," he addressed Tryers, "if you go and get converted between Newhaven and Dieppe, what *will* happen to you on the way to Australia? It's an awful risk."

Tryers tapped with his foot. "Very well." He spoke with forced calm. "Very well. I did not expect sympathy. I did expect ridicule. I am not disappointed. But events will prove that I am in earnest."

"He never got to Paris, you see," Welsh broke in. "So that does seem to show that —"

"Curse you!" Tryers exclaimed furiously.

"Come, come," said Edward. "You surprise me."

"I can't help it." Tryers' tone now indicated distress. "You know how he always stirs up all that is worst in me. And at this time! — Well, I am going. I shall go to the office, and sleep there. I'm tired out. Practically no sleep last night."

"When do you start for Australia?" Edward asked.

"Impossible to say yet." Tryers became suddenly quiet and businesslike. "I must see my Australian friend first and talk it over. He's in London now. The vicar of a parish in Sydney. They want a larger church."

"Well." Edward straightened his tie in the mirror. "I wish you luck. You'll enjoy the voyage, I should imagine. And if you manage to leave at the right time you'll get two summers running. De-

lightful. I shall think of you on board ship. Sociable people like you are in their element there. I can see you getting up everything — the sports, shuffle-board tournaments, pocket-golf, concerts and theatricals. The dances are the only things that won't be in your line. The part of you that is like George Forrest will be more in evidence with every day of the voyage. Couldn't you take George with you?" he added rather maliciously. "He's exactly the kind of man they want in the colonies."

Tryers looked uncomfortable. "I am not going to Australia for the sake of the voyage," he said with his foreshortened assumption of dignity.

"You can't get there without a voyage," Edward rejoined lightly. "You may as well make the most of it. But I must go to my dinner. I leave you both in excellent company. Good-bye."

"Oh, but — my dear friend." Welsh rose in his chair, his tone was remonstrant. "You've missed everything. You must hear how it all happened. The star-lit night, the throbbing of the engines, the quiet deck — Reggie all alone there under the stars, with the dark waters round him! The solemnity of that! Then he went down to his cabin — no, to the saloon, wasn't it, Reggie? — and then —"

"Shut up! Will you shut up?" Tryers showed contorted features.

"Quite right." Edward stopped with his hand on the door. "This is too bad of you, Welsh. Undressing souls in public. Perfectly shameless. Do

give Tryers something to eat, and try and behave properly. Remember he never got as far as Paris. Had to waste his ticket, most likely. — No, not a moment longer. My friend will be impatient. Good night.”

CHAPTER XVII

EDWARD learnt from Welsh the next morning that Tryers had stayed on for hours, and might be expected again that afternoon. They were safe from him now; he would of course be attending an Anglican Mass, but after lunch there was no doubt that he would turn up. Edward expressed nonchalant surprise.

"Why," he asked, "does he always turn up? It seems you give him pain, not pleasure."

"Well." The other hesitated, and struck a match which at once went out. It was the third he had failed to light. "Well, I think it really is that he's afraid I shall get too much pleasure if he keeps away. He would torture himself all the time wondering what I was doing, what kind of enjoyment I was in for. So if he's anywhere near me, there's no shaking him off."

"I always thought him feminine."

"Yes, he is. I tell him so. Nothing annoys him more."

"He won't come with us to-night, will he?" Edward succeeded in speaking indifferently.

"Oh, no. He can't endure them. He says they are effeminate and affected. He classes them with the æsthetes of the 'nineties. They are all the same

to him. He certainly won't come. He has only met Root once, and then he was very indignant. Said the man was an impertinent schoolboy, and that he'd never been so rudely treated in his life. Oh yes, he recurred to Root last night. I told him we were going. He said — you know that way he has of saying things, shooting out his sharp thin chin as if it were the tongue of a snake — well, he said: 'Oh, Raoul Root. A very evil man. I would never trust a man of his type.' He asked me why I wanted to drag you into that kind of set."

"I hope you succeeded in propitiating him."

"Oh yes, I think I did," Welsh replied seriously. "I said that it wasn't, of course, Raoul Root that I wanted you to meet. I laid great stress on Eunice Dinwiddie, reminded him that she was the only woman he had ever admired."

"He admired her!" Edward was involuntarily indignant.

"Oh yes. Spoke with unusual warmth of her, quite unusual for Reggie. He said she really had some artistic feeling, and that her beauty was most uncommon. I think he called her a Madonna; very inappropriate, but the kind of thing he would say."

"Well. What did he say to my meeting her?"

"He was ungracious. Yes, I must say he was rather ungracious. Altogether, he was not in his best mood after you left. I took him out to have something to eat, too. But that didn't improve his temper. He was irritable and querulous. Ah yes,

about you and the Divinity, I said, you know, that I quite expected you to capture her."

"Hardly the way to make him less irritable."

"I thought it would interest him. I thought it rather an exciting thing to say. But it made him angry. He said you'd never get her, that it was one of my mad ideas. He was annoyed, too, because the meeting is to be at Mrs. van Spless's. My going to wealthy houses always annoys him. He thinks I should be admitted only to the very humblest homes. And he was galled already, you see, because of my having the power to bring any one into contact with a person so beautiful, so distinguished, and so rich as Eunice Dinwiddie. It worries him horribly that you should owe this to me. That I should be associated in your mind with the Divinity and Mrs. van Spless's house, it is really torture to Reggie! But all this makes it the more certain that he won't come. It would humiliate him intolerably to trail in to Mrs. van Spless's as my friend."

"I wish," said Edward, "that people could manage to get converted in some way that would make a difference for the better to their friends and acquaintances. It seems that Tryers will be converted into nothing but an unpleasant and virtuous old maid. No one will be the happier for his continence and his going to Mass. The fact is, his vices used to excuse him for a great deal that was disagreeable; they gave him scope, he worked off his energy by yielding and by reaction. He was to some extent interesting

— he had life. His unscrupulousness, too, there was colour in that, and in his being a hermaphrodite type. He was unlike other people, and that's valuable enough in England. Of course he'll continue to be unlike other people, but he'll find such extremely unpleasant outlets for his energy that there'll be no bearing with him. If his conversion holds, I really cannot keep him up any longer. It won't be worth it."

Welsh sprang to his feet.

"My friend, how I admire your courage! Your determination! Aren't you afraid of his vindictiveness? Reggie will never forgive you. He'll damage you if he possibly can. I should never have the courage to — no, I couldn't!"

"I must be on my guard against this vendetta." Edward smiled. "My word, but I'll look behind me on dark nights after this. The gleam of a stiletto will never escape me."

"Ah, you don't know." Welsh gesticulated dramatically. "You don't know what he is capable of. But you have courage. I was always sure of that. You can carry anything off. I believe you will win the Divinity. I back you for that against Reggie! But, good heavens, we must wear evening clothes to-night, and I have none with me. I must go out and hire some. I know where to go. Tottenham Court Road. You ring the back door bell on Sundays." He picked his hat from the floor, clutched it, and was gone in a moment.

CHAPTER XVIII

THEY reached Mrs. van Spless's house by nine o'clock. Welsh was extraordinary in his hired evening dress, but Edward noted that although the fit was execrable he looked extremely well. Aristocratic, even. He might have been a Russian nobleman, certainly anything but an English travelling lecturer. Why he looked Russian, Edward could not explain to himself at once. There was something Mongolian, no doubt, in his high cheek-bones, his small eyes, that sometimes looked so weary, his blunt and ineffectual features. But there was more in it than that. Welsh's expression was Russian, and particularly Russian at that moment. It was the degenerate look of an old and earth-sodden race: it signalled emotional vigour both turbulent and morbid, a vigour beyond the direction of the brain: and then, again, there was the impression of a spirit prepared for abandonment, for a self-exposure seen as tragical in face of an ultimate inevitable reserve of all that lay low down, all that was really essential, really significant. This man would flourish his emotions recklessly in pathetic parade, would be forever bringing all that he could to the surface: but though thus getting rid of what he

could, he was unable, and knew invariably, in the end, that he would be always unable, to get rid of what oppressed him. That secret understanding of life in profound disillusion — it was this that would come back to his eyes, and come back again for all his efforts.

Was Welsh so Russian to-night simply because he had been agitated over hiring his dress clothes? No doubt that had something to do with it; here was the proximate cause, but Edward knew well enough, really, how shallow cynics are misled by proximate causes. He continued to be occupied with his reflections on Welsh's soul: he walked mechanically into Mrs. van Spless's hall, he stood there absently while one of her men took his hat and cape from him. Then he suddenly realised that he was about to meet Eunice Dinwiddie, and wondered at himself for thinking of her so little.

Mrs. van Spless, a woman in the forties, with a neat finished figure, received them with that elaborate and artificial calm so laboriously acquired by American ladies of the selected circles. The nervous excitement natural to her race was betrayed only by her eyes. They seemed to Edward preternaturally bright and alert, their glances were restlessly ubiquitous, darting hither and thither as mice do over dangerous ground. She seemed to be seeing everything at once, and she gave the impression of being strictly withheld from anything but the merest surface view of what she saw. She held herself erect in a well-

lessoned way. Her dress, of course, was proof against any criticism, designed expressly for being proof against it. Her lace and her jewels, too, they could be no less, they could be no more: it was all so exactly right,—it was like Henry James. Edward understood for the first time how entirely American Henry James was.

The lady extended an object that showed itself primarily as a triumph for the manicurist's art, and secondarily as a hand. Edward bowed low, after Welsh's example. In certain American social circles, he remembered, they cultivated eighteenth century manners. "I am happy, madam," he murmured, "I am most happy."

Mrs. van Spless's greeting disappointed him. He was prepared that evening for strange tones, unusual colours in everything. It all must, he felt, at least lend itself to an exciting interpretation. Was he being influenced, then, by Welsh?

Of the lecturer Mrs. van Spless evidently had some opinion. She was treating him, Edward could see, as a guest of distinction. For half a minute she had held his hand. Probably he was lionised in America, where lecturers, like actors in England, grow into celebrities. "This is good luck for us," she was saying. "We all thought you were in the country, at your summer home." How she lingered on the word "home." She seemed to charge it with full measure of domesticity. Edward remembered that other Americans he had met did that, with the

same peculiar broadening and emphasising of the "o." They always said "home" when they could, instead of "house."

"You described it all so beautifully in one of your lectures," Mrs. van Spless went on. "Such an atmosphere of English rural peace you gave us; the garden, the lobelias, the dahlias, and the geraniums. Oh, Mr. Welsh, I shall never forget how beautifully you spoke of the geraniums! We could see them, we could even smell them. And Mrs. Welsh, how is she? And the little boy? Has he still his toy gun? You remember you were so afraid he would have an accident. And the little dog? Who would worry you to take him out for walks when you wanted to write, but you hadn't the heart to refuse him. You see, Mr. Welsh, what a good pupil I am. I remember everything."

She went on. Welsh gravely appeared to listen, till the arrival of other guests released him. Edward in the meantime had caught sight of an acquaintance of his in the crowded room, a man whom he had never cultivated, but whom he was always running up against, in theatres, in restaurants, in clubs, in the street; in fact, anywhere. It had always been said of Foxy Fenton that there was no getting out of his way. Edward had met him first at Cambridge, where he had earned his nickname of "Foxy." The man was a born intriguer; he had started intriguing at his private school and had never stopped since. He was also an inordinate talker,

would gossip for hours, spoke with unqualified positiveness on every subject, and could tell more lies in half an hour than most men in a life-time. Edward had a certain regard for him, because he was the most thorough adventurer he knew. On this occasion the first thought that passed through his mind on seeing Foxy was that he really would not lend him, this time, more than a sovereign.

“Dear fellow,” Fenton began — he always began “Dear fellow” — “and who would have thought it? You here! And who is your friend?” Welsh had been left behind, captured by three ladies. “Distinguished looking man, but how amazingly he ties his tie — upon my word! Amusing show this, isn’t it?” He rattled on in his intimate way. “Too many old women, though. These American places are always packed with old women. You know that man Root? Why doesn’t he turn up? Queer lot of people here. Odd fish, between ourselves, eh? But great fun. Oh, great fun. Ella van Spless has managed to knock up some decent connections. Her elder daughter — expect you’ve heard — just married my old friend Martlesham. Happisburgh’s eldest son, you know. Good stroke of business. She really got in through her cousins, the Honks. Extraordinary names, these Americans have.” He chuckled perfunctorily — a professional chuckle. “Homer K. Honk, money in steel rails. Could buy the van Splesses up, lock, stock and barrel. Oh yes, and still have millions. Most of his daughters have

got their money's worth. Helen P. got the old duke, old Flintshire; second girl's going to marry Lord Arthur, you remember Arthur Brayle — what, don't you know him? thought you did, he's quite in the running for the marquise, you know, brother most unlikely to have any children. Then Honk's youngest daughter, — Oenone, she is: imagine it, dear fellow — Oenone Honk! She's the beauty of the family, and the old man's worried to death for fear she'll run off with one of the chauffeurs! She won't come in line at all. I tell young Mandeville he really ought to have a shot for her — good-looking fellow, Mandeville, the best-looking peer about town — not worth a red cent, though, everything mortgaged, must marry money. — Great fun, great fun." He chuckled again. "Such a relief seeing you here, Raynes. These women are too awful. They talk your head off. No one here of any account." Fenton swept the room with a contemptuous glance. "The new art, and all that. Outsiders, all of them. Suppose it amuses Ella van Spless. But where is Root? And that girl — Eileen Dimminy —"

"Eunice Dinwiddie."

"Oh yes, of course, of course. Extraordinary names. Never can remember them. Good-looking girl, got some money, too. Quite in a small way, of course. Between ourselves, I'm not disinclined to cultivate Eunice Dinwiddie. I can't fly as high as the Honks."

"Damn your impudence," thought Edward.

"I'm here on business, of course." Fenton knew no intermission. "They're starting a new paper, and I want to make something out of it. They've got people to pay, you see. Shifty lot, these Americans, though. Shouldn't wonder if I never saw so much as a single fiver. I'm fearfully hard up, of course, always am." Edward recognised the opening. "Between ourselves, I'm at my wits' end. It's awful, this business of money. Lucky dog you are, Raynes, wish I could get some legacies. No one ever leaves me a penny. But I'm writing, of course; article every week for the *Gazette*. Bad pay, though, very bad. But they're giving me a leg up this autumn. One of their best men is leaving them, and I'm taking on his job. I've had a novel accepted by Rogers, too — coming out at Christmas. Quite good royalties. Buy a copy, won't you? By Jove, old man, I tell you what, I'll dedicate it to you! Splendid idea! 'Little Fishes' is the title. Quite light, of course, quite light, but the sort of stuff that ought to sell. Oh yes, I shall be doing famously very soon. But just now times are bad, very bad. At my wits' end. I hate to worry you, dear fellow, but if you could, just for a couple of weeks, do me the favour of a tenner?"

"No one can refuse you, Fenton," said Edward sweetly. "A tenner, I take it, is one of your figures of speech. I am good for a sovereign."

"Thanks awfully!" Fenton replied, without

change of tone or expression. "So good of you. I'll send you a cheque in a fortnight. Let's come and take some Portish wine." Edward remembered this as a facetious turn of Cambridge days. "I insisted on the Portish. We'll drift over to that table. Drinks here not half bad. Ella van Spless gets me to choose them; as she would put it she '*has* me choose them.' Queer phrases they have, these Americans, eh?" The professional chuckle was again brought into play.

They made their way to the refreshment table, Fenton nodding and smiling to this quarter and that. He went on talking, growing neither more nor less familiar, always on the same level of amicable and lively chat. "Perfectly dreadful people," he remarked indifferently, with a look round.

"Tell me," Edward took his chance for a word. "About this girl who is coming here to-night. Is she much run after?"

"Who? Eunice? Oh yes, she is the Dinwiddie. Quite *the* Dinwiddie. Queens it in this set — undisputed. That's why she's bound to come in very late. They all attend on her. I shall pay court, of course. I must be in with her, if I'm to get what I want here. I manage her pretty well, I think. It's fairly easy. When once you've got the hang of their kind of talk."

"That's just what I want," said Edward, "to get the hang. Let's listen." He slipped a sovereign deftly into Fenton's palm. "These two ladies," he

lowered his voice, "do you think they have the hang? Anyhow, I'm afraid that so long as we are here, drinking the Portish, we shall be able to listen to nobody else."

The ladies in question seemed certainly bent on making themselves heard above the hubbub. They were both sufficiently American without opening their mouths: their nationality, when they talked, was underscored to a rude excess.

"But isn't he just too charming?" The elder voice was scraping at highest pitch. "And think, my dear, when he was only five years old, with his pretty golden curls all around his shoulders, he said: 'Momma, I'm going to be the greatest po-ut that ever lived!'"

"My, how sweet!" The younger woman showed two teeth of shining gold. "His hair is surely wonderful. I say his crowning glow-ry is his hair."

"But did you know, my dear, did you know that at fifteen years of age he simply created his face?"

"Created his—?" the other gasped. "Created his face! You don't say!"

"Yes. By massage. They say his nose was rather turnippy then, and his cheeks real fat, but he changed it all, by night and morning massage. Just fig-yoor that lovely wonder-child rubbing away night and day, with an Ovid or a Virgil propped up in front of him, perhaps!"

"Why, he's here!" The younger lady gave a

Zoo Bird House scream. Both moved hurriedly off, overcome for the moment into silence.

"They haven't the hang," murmured Edward, "I'm afraid they have hardly the hang."

Fenton finished his Port. "So Root's turned up," he said. "I must get hold of him. Fearful job, getting hold of Root here. — Yes, there he is, with Ella van Spless."

CHAPTER XIX

EDWARD became aware of a hush of voices and a surging to and fro in the room. A space by the door of entrance was being cleared. The two American ladies who had pressed forward in the excitement of the moment were arrested by a tall pale young man with fair hair and gold-rimmed pince-nez. He persuasively piloted them towards the wall. There was a general drawing back by the entrance, a general massing up in other parts of the room. From a room beyond came a murmur and a stir that gave the impression of some excitement and anticipation. "Rah-rah's turned up." Edward heard a clipped voice behind him. "Good old buffer. Nice old thing."

Edward observed Raoul Root's beautiful entrance in the mirror at his end of the room. The prophet had dismissed Mrs. van Spless with a gracious wave of his hand, and she was watching him in still admiration as he stood poised by the door, waiting the moment for most effective advance. "Certainly," Edward thought, "he understands showing off. That calculated insolence of his is very well done."

"What a circus!" Fenton gurgled at Edward's elbow. "Did you ever see such a circus? Look at

his frilled shirt, and his velvet jacket and his little Vandyck beard. And his hair! How does he manage to get it to stand up stiff like that?"

The moment arrived. Raoul Root entered, casting glances under quizzically twisted eyebrows, glances partly humorous, partly tender, partly disparaging, for his intimates and disciples. For enemies and strangers he had looks of bored vacuity. Edward was impressed by these rapid alternations. The Prophet's "crowning glory" stood up from his white forehead very crisp and shining; his fair skin looked unusually soft, really milky. Edward found a distinct charm in his slender erectness, "but he's cocky," he thought, "spiritually cocky, to the last imaginable degree."

Welsh, deserted by his ladies since Root's appearance, and now engaged in conversation with an emaciated and decrepit old gentleman, very unobtrusive, from Boston by his appearance, was the first person honoured by the Prophet's speech. Root stopped in front of the lecturer and raised two fingers.

"Qu'est-ce que c'est que l'art?" he asked. Welsh frowned in great perplexity. "The O'Malley reads us a paper to-night. You'll talk about it afterwards."

"About what, about what?" Welsh put his hand to his forehead.

"About art. When she's finished."

Root readjusted his fingers, smiled benevolently on Welsh and passed on into the arms of Fenton, who

with great agility had made his way to intercept him. Fenton patted the Prophet's shoulder.

"Dear fellow," Edward was within easy range of the words, "a word with you. You must favour me to-night, you really must for a moment." Root's stare did not in the least disconcert him. "We've all come specially for you, and I'm the most unconscionably selfish creature here, so I must see you first, eh?" He chuckled, just as usual. "Come with me and drink a liqueur. I've made a corner for you, such a beautiful corner. Tell me first about this Rogers man — he's publishing me in the autumn. Give me your advice, dear fellow, do."

"Oh, Rogers." Raoul Root was won — the capture recognized by all spectators, who began, with relieved tension, to chatter and laugh and move about as before. "Oh, Rogers. Good old guy, Rogers. One of my greatest admirers. You tell him you're a friend of mine. He'll do anything for you."

Edward moved away as the two men approached. He felt more inclined to look at Root than to listen to him. He didn't, somehow, want his pose and his talk together. Besides, Fenton was beginning to wear on him. Fenton always did; Fenton, it seemed, wound himself up every morning for an unvaried automatic run.

"I'll dedicate it to you! And now, dear fellow, about this little venture of ours — the new paper.

You know, I fancy our good Sir John will —” Edward heard as he passed out of earshot into the next room.

He kept Root in sight. The Prophet was taking his liqueur with a fine grace; his white thin fingers showed exquisitely as he conducted the glass to his lips, and Edward noticed a curious ring of, it seemed, Venetian make, with a topaz that flashed when Root turned his hand. The man had taken pains with his part, he was thorough, as a good man of business should be: all this was to be commended.

This other room was not so crowded. The people there had divided themselves into several little groups of threes and fours: there were more men than women, and the men did most of the talking. Edward decided that he would join in one of the conversations, he would have another shot at “getting the hang.” The attack must be made. He selected three very young men who were standing talking near a window. They might be, he reflected, as well as any others, authentically *les jeunes*. Their pseudo-debonair gestures, their pseudo-light laughter, their air of knowing all about it, of being emphatically, entirely, there, — these things gave promise. One of them was distinctly good-looking, with black smooth hair and large remarkable eyes. Edward liked good-looking young people. He made his way.

“I wish to join you,” he said.

There was a slight flutter. One of the three raised his eyebrows slightly and turned for his cue to the young man with the large eyes.

"There is so much, you see," Edward went on, "that I want to know. I am quite — quite, you understand, uninitiated. Tell me now, to begin with, what do you think of Mr. Raoul Root?"

The handsome young man laughed. "A gentle modest creature," he replied. "One of the most bashful kind creatures who ever walked this earth. All that famous arrogance and petulance and fierceness — simply a pose. A wearisome pose. Rah-rah is modest and moral. As the uncleanness of his language increases his moral sentiment becomes more and more marked. You should read my article on him in last month's *Crash*. Good stuff, some of it."

"I'll read it," said Edward excitedly. "Honest, I'll read it. So you write articles. But why not poetry? I was hoping so much you would write poetry. You look," he went on desperately, "as though you saw many beautiful things."

"Poetry? Of course. I'm an Imagist. Read Rah-rah's article on me. *Crash* of the month before last. He's the only person bright enough to appreciate us, and we're the only people bright enough to appreciate him. He's written the greatest poem of the century. Life hit him, and he registered the punch. Now that he's a Vorticist, he doesn't do such great work."

"Forgive me, but what is a Vorticist?"

"Vorticism," the young man rejoined gravely, "is the death of necrology in art: kills imitation of dead writers."

"Good Lord!" cried Edward, "I'm a literary necrophiliast! What would Krafft-Ebing make of me?" Delighted by his indubitable discovery of *les jeunes*, he turned to one of the other youths. "You paint amazing pictures," he declared. "Ideas of no other century. I know. Or you write novels, Imagist novels. Or Vorticist Tragedies. Tell me your dreams," he continued with eager impatience, "each one of you in turn, tell me his dreams."

The young man addressed faced Edward somewhat defiantly. He wore a small Vandyck, very like Root's; he had bright small grey eyes, a well cut determined chin, but a negligible nose. His figure was turned with an almost French elegance. One was evidently meant to associate him with the newest phases of the Latin Quarter.

"Novels?" Edward recognised the clipped voice, which took on now a tone of surprised resentment, as though novels had become extinct ages ago. "It's a bore to read a novel. And we only want tragedy if it can clench its side-muscles like hands on its belly, and bring to the surface a laugh like a bomb. No: I run *Crash*. We've just given Rah-rah the chuck. For prose, at any rate. His prose is — Ma foi!" He flicked his fingers. "C'est à vomir! We shall take verse of his now and again,

though. But Rah-rah's prime is over. He's going off horribly, can't find himself any more."

"Mr. Cramer!" Edward heard a female voice, agitated and beseeching, behind him. "If you would only talk to me, Mr. Cramer!"

The handsome young man turned, and Edward withdrew, giving place to a spare, rather angular girl, with straight sandy hair and an anæmic complexion. "I'm in such trouble!" she communicated in low stricken tones. "I misquoted some of his lines in a review yesterday — some of his beautiful lines. If he should speak harshly to me here I know I should break down. Oh, I shouldn't have come — but I felt that I must see him. I must, I —" Her pale green eyes, the eyes of a fanatic, were eloquent of distress; she clasped her thin hands together.

Edward, drawing back decently out of hearing, discovered himself in the arms of Welsh, who looked most harassed. "What am I to do?" he cried. "Root commands me to speak after this paper. I simply cannot talk in drawing-rooms, and to people of this kind. And the paper's to be in French — in French! I shan't understand a word of it. But there's no getting at Raoul Root. That man is still talking to him about their new magazine, and he's drinking endless liqueurs. And he's surrounded. Look at him! The most preposterous thing. He stands and flourishes his glass: the man goes on talking — you see, on that side. Then on the other side

he holds court. They pass in a long line, and he throws off a nod or an eyebeam or a word to each. Yes, he holds court. These Americans are extraordinary. They have an Hebraic lack of humour."

"A good many English here, too, aren't there?" Edward turned and watched the scene, finding it very much as Welsh described.

"English? Yes, but the Americans run the show. I suppose Root is a master in the line of running shows."

"Who is that?" Edward lowered his voice. "The girl talking to those three boys by that window?"

"Oh! — Ah, Miss Grieves. She's on a woman's paper. A most unfortunate individual. She has a violent infatuation for Root. A devastating infatuation. It strips her of dignity and humour. An idealistic affair, of course.— Ah there is little Massington; he's Raoul Root's satellite-in-chief. If I can't get Root I must get him. I'll bring him to you. A cross between a faun and a walrus, Root calls him. But remember to behave as though you thought that Root were the satellite and Massington the planet. That is most important."

Welsh was gone, and during his absence Edward attended to the conversation round about. He remembered what Welsh had told him of the studied smartness of this set, of their way of keeping, at all costs, the ball in motion. Yes, they were certainly doing that, they caught adroitly, passed on, and

caught again. "Sprightly," that was what they were, and a great deal too sprightly to be comfortable. Edward, as he listened, grew more and more convinced that in the background of all this free and easy chatter was the haunting fear of making a false step, of being found out. And the effect was, on the whole, stilted, an effect of something learnt and practised. Welsh was right, Welsh was a good judge outside of his own circle. No doubt of it, these people were stilted, they lacked humour.

Welsh soon reappeared. "Mr. Wilfrid Massington," he introduced. "The most important person of all for you to meet."

Edward was confronted by a young man of small stature and of that extreme and conscious self-possession which little men frequently show. Massington nodded, on the introduction, with a peculiar deliberate impertinence.

"It seems that this gentleman is worried." He spoke in a high-pitched eclectic tone, waving his hand decoratively towards Welsh. Edward noticed that he, too, wore a Venetian ring set with a topaz. "Positively worried! And all because Rah-rah asked him to speak. Rah-rah isn't Gawd. And he's drunk already. He always gets drunk here. He won't notice, bless him, who speaks and who doesn't. Why don't *you* say something," he attacked Edward, "in the room of this distracted gentleman?"

"I will," Edward rejoined instantly. "I certainly will."

"Of course," the little man went on, "I might talk myself. I have to write up the damn paper anyway. But —"

"Oh, no." Edward was decided. "I will certainly speak."

"What courage!" declared Welsh. "I always said you had courage."

Edward was observing with some interest that Massington's nose was even smaller than the rest of him warranted.— So many young men with small noses! Was it, he wondered, the effect of the atmosphere? He grew a shade anxious, and was tempted to feel his own.

"Mr. Massington," Edward asked, "tell me, how did you succeed in making Raoul Root what he is? What were your methods?"

Even Massington was a little taken aback by this. He stared and hesitated, while Welsh gave signs of delight.

"Oh, Raoul Root." The young man replied with a laugh that was just perceptibly uneasy. "The making of Raoul Root! My ideas about Rah-rah are strictly for the public."

"Miss Grieves seems to be in some trouble," Welsh observed. "Do you know, Mr. Massington, what is the matter?"

"Oh yes," Massington was relieved by the

change of subject. "Ça ne fut qu'une bagatelle. She misquoted Rah-rah. Well, he can bear misquotation. But I made it all right with the poor girl. I said that I'd spoken to Raoul. I told her that he had just laughed and said she wouldn't mind, that she'd rather be beaten by him than praised by another. Thought I'd better tell her that, so that she wouldn't worry over it."

Edward observed that Root had at last left the refreshment table. He was now standing in the middle of the room, clustered round and about with eager young men and women, all of them flattered by the contact with his regally impressed personality. The Prophet's voice and laughter were clearly to be distinguished from his humming environment. Evidently all was well. Root had been drinking, but he knew how to drink: "and that, too," Edward considered, "is something. The man has his points." Mrs. van Spless, with two youths in attendance, was hovering on the outskirts of the throng surrounding the guest of honour. She seemed expectant, but content.

"Raoul," remarked Massington, giving his chin a little tilt, "Raoul va très bien. He is a baby, mais, que voulez-vous? C'est un bébé charmant. What would we do, without him to amuse us?"

"When are they going to read the paper?" asked Welsh. Edward's offer to speak had not entirely quelled his anxiety.

"When Eunice turns up," replied Massington.

"She'll be here soon. She told me she wouldn't be later than usual." He tilted his chin again, and in doing so caught Root's eye, which invited him to join the central cluster. "I leave you now," he concluded, and went.

Edward and Welsh interchanged glances.

"You see," said Welsh, "how it goes. You wouldn't think, would you, that young Massington runs at Root's heels, that he fetches and carries for him, and waits day and night on his pleasure?"

"I don't know. I'm inclined to believe that that is precisely what I should think."

"You would? But that is because you are so wise. That is because your forehead is so massive."

"Exactly. But now I want you to take me to the next room, to some point of vantage near the door, and to introduce me at the earliest possible moment to Miss Eunice Dinwiddie, before she is irretrievably surrounded."

"Excellent. I will." Welsh rubbed his hands. "But, —" he hesitated, again he looked troubled. "Can I? I don't know. These little matters are sometimes so very difficult."

"Nonsense. Perfectly easy. I won't make your speech for you, if you don't."

"You have me, my friend, you have me. I submit. I yield to your sweet tyranny. Your command shall be obeyed. Your will be done!"

As they went, Edward's thoughts turned once more to the girl of the gallery. He tried to analyse

his will, this will that was to be done, he tried to trace back to its emotional origin. How far had Welsh influenced him? He had started him on this road, of course, but Edward had followed the pointing finger freely and willingly, he had made the road his own. He was not really being carried away: he knew what he was about. Perhaps he was being carried away by the idea of being carried away. Was it the sense of a masquerade that appealed to him? Yes, he felt like a masquerader. . . . But certainly he had somehow or other acquired a surface of unusual sensitiveness, quite distinct from his normal field of consciousness, a surface that was played upon with peculiar effect whenever this girl came within range. When he had heard of Tryers' remark: "He'll never win her," when Fenton in his insolent man-of-the-world way had indicated Eunice as a possible mark of his own, because he couldn't "fly as high as the Honks," Edward had been moved genuinely, and strangely. What did all this mean? Could he call himself free? Were his eyes really open? Then there was that absurd lunch yesterday, and that long walk: he had to admit that he had been ruffled, disturbed. He had reacted, he had enjoyed an admirable dinner, but still — what was he after? He wished he knew. How much more difficult it was to account for oneself than to account for other people! Well, he would play his game, he would keep his head, he would observe himself.

“She’s here!” cried Welsh. Edward followed his companion’s glance towards the door. Yes, she was there. The girl of the gallery was certainly there.

CHAPTER XX

EDWARD was determined to lose nothing of his judgment: he clenched it with an effort. But she was admirable, none the less. For this occasion, it appeared, she had decided not to be enigmatic, but ingenuous. The effect had been, he could see, just as delicately calculated as the effect of the night before last. Her pose was perfect. What could be more fascinating than that studied artlessness — studied, yes, evidently, but still so unassailably managing not to give itself away? Raoul Root's exhibition was crude in comparison, an underlined thing, grossly managed. Root had tried to do something that only a woman could do perfectly. A man could no more express his personality by the way he entered a drawing-room than a woman could express hers by the way she spoke in a public hall. One should regard the inhibitions of one's sex. Root lapsed, he became inglorious.

But why had Edward dreamt of insoluble enigmas, hidden deeps and all that? Confound it, it was Welsh's fault! When he was about, one always did the easiest thing. Welsh was demoralising. Eunice's genius lay, of course, in the consistency and the logic of her acting.

“What is thy substance, whereof art thou made,
That millions of strange shadows on thee tend?”

Edward, as the lines came to him, experienced an unwitting exaltation, the kind of exaltation that a sudden breaking out of music, whether good or bad, often stirred in him. Everything was strangely heightened, — the value of the present scene, the value of those lines, the value of his own personality, the value of the girl. How had she brought all this about? this “exaltation in fervour!”

The mood held, but at the same time annoyance broke into a corner of Edward’s brain. Why was he so much at the mercy of other men’s phrases? Why was he constrained to quote Shakespeare and Meredith to himself at a moment like this? These twentieth century young men, literary Futurists or Cubists or whatever one might call them, were they right after all? Was his own consciousness hampered and stunted by literary tradition? Perhaps he had been really more himself in his light-blue days, when he hardly read anything. No, but then, too, he was under tradition of another sort. He had never been himself; some people might think he had character, really he had no character at all. And now he was being fooled: he was ridiculously “exalted in fervour” still. What nonsense it was! She was simply a good-looking girl, and she knew how to act. But at any rate she made him reflect. He continued to look at her.

She attracted him more strongly than before. She

was just sufficiently over-tall for her epicene figure, draped in flowing grey, to give a charming effect of blown mist. Her head, with its little smooth crown and childishly ruffled inexpert roll of hair, was made to be held tenderly and savagely between a lover's hands. Her features were Greek, they suggested a hamadryad; only one flaw, her nose was insufficient. So many insufficient noses! Edward wished he knew why.

No one greeted the Divinity. Her whim to be the first to speak was always respected. The result was an effective hush into which her rich low beautifully modulated voice might break like a note from an organ. Edward watched her greet one and another with a sweet and sudden childlike caprice. Only once was the illusion broken: once she glanced round, and her eyes were hard, cold, calculating, as for the fraction of a second she gauged the rapt faces. Edward, though repelled, sympathised with her: he could appreciate the feminine cynicism with which she played her game.

He turned. He had looked long enough. He wanted to hold himself back, to parley with his judgment.— Welsh had disappeared,—no, there he was in a corner, again with the old gentleman from Boston. Fenton had apparently gone: Raoul Root was in the other room: the moment was favourable. Edward was glad that Welsh's courage had failed for the introduction. Better to meet Eunice some other way, or better perhaps not to meet

her at all. So much that he might have to enter in upon, if he met her!

He was startled by a light touch on his arm. The girl herself was by him. She bent towards him, and seemed to be quivering almost away. Marvellous. "Your eyes are sad," she said. "What are you seeking?"

Edward was unprepared. He paused. Then in a long-drawn sibilant tone he replied: "I was waiting for you." It sufficed. They stood gazing, as though each bathed in the personality of the other. Her eyes were still, fathomless, seductive. "Material entertainment here," Edward reflected grossly. He had his hand well on the reins.

He was beginning to feel that he could not stand this prolonged gaze, when suddenly she lowed at him: "What beautiful thing have you been doing?" Welsh had warned him that he would be asked this, and he had amused himself by preparing poetically veiled eroticisms for his reply. They would not do now. This girl was not innocent, but she was initiated in a way that Edward had not foreseen. He felt that much might rest upon his power to invent.

"Ah," he whispered, "before I came the will was upon me to create. Yet I was withheld. A presence,—invisible to those who have but the usual eye—" he fixed a sightless stare upon the company, "impalpable, imponderable, yet clinging and cleaving sans ruth—" Was this all right? He re-

sumed rapidly, with determination. "It came between me and the paper. It shrouded the pen I would have grasped. I cried aloud. One answered. And in my little chamber there was the glint of iridescent feathers. That which withheld me was no more, and I created."

Edward stopped, in the midst of a solemn hush. He was, of course, overheard, as he had meant to be. After a second he turned his gaze full upon the girl. "*You* understand me," he palpitated.

"Yes," she replied, "yes, I do," giving the last word almost three syllables. "Later, come to me where I sit. You shall tell me your beautiful dreams."

The Divinity glided away. She had shown the mark of her highest favour. People stirred. Edward brought his blank stare again into play; after Root's manner he looked at this face and that as though to assure himself that it was not there. He raised his hand and ruffled his hair a trifle: then strode towards the refreshment table.

"I say, old man." Fenton had sprung up at his elbow. "You are going it a bit, eh?" He spoke with a touch of envy.

"Don't speak to me," Edward hissed. "Can't you see my game is neither to hear nor to speak nor to see till she's ready for me again?"

He could see Eunice talking to Mrs. van Spless, and realising that he was in her view, he poured out a liqueur, inventing his gestures as he went on. He

was careful not to copy Raoul Root; he aimed at a demeanour that should be reverential and yet infused by inalienable dignity. A recurring sweep of his hands upwards went for an indication of prayer. His idea was to be absorbed and devotional, a suppliant, but at the same time the highest of high priests. Luckily he only very nearly, not quite, broke his liqueur-glass.

He moved a few steps from the table to a place of comparative isolation by a mantelpiece, against which he leaned, throwing his body into a suggestive mould.

The voice of Raoul Root, talking apparently to several people at once, broke in upon him.

"I've reached a point of consciousness at which I can enter a salon unclothed. . . . Imagism abhors Imagery. We've nothing to do with Image-making. Imagery is one of the worn-out decorations that we have scrapped. . . . Must speak to that man Welsh. Lucky devil, do you know he makes five thousand dollars a month lecturing in America? Of course Welsh belongs to a better and nobler age. He thinks of himself in terms of Lucifer son of the morning. . . . Yes, a beautiful night. And the flower of the English aristocracy." The voice was lowered impressively. "The very flower."

Edward was surprised. Welsh's income so much larger than his own — how remarkable to earn a thousand pounds a month, and yet to give so strong an impression of a hand-to-mouth existence! Some

genius in that, perhaps,—if it were true. And then “the flower of the English aristocracy.” Was Root after all really an incorrigible *naïf*? or just a bluffer? If that was bluff, it was very well done.

Edward leaned his head against the carved post of the mantelpiece. He looked at Eunice. She and Mrs. van Spless had been joined by another woman, whose back was turned to him. She was short and plump and seemed to be excited. Eunice was drawing back from her in shrinking remonstrance, with lips parted for tremulous speech. Mrs. van Spless laid one hand on the Divinity’s shoulder, and seemed to be saying something reassuring. Then she advanced and addressed the company.

“Mrs. O’Malley,” she said in a clear penetrating tone. She waited for the chatter to die down. “Mrs. O’Malley,” she repeated, and then, after a second pause, “will read us her paper.”

“Damn!” said Root, under his breath. He was at Welsh’s elbow.

Mrs. O’Malley stepped forward to the piano, unfolded her manuscript, and spread it out deliberately before her. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes very bright. She struck Edward as a vigorous, amiable little woman.

“Lard,” she enunciated with emphasis in a pleasant brogue, “*que’est-ce que c’est que lard?*”

Eunice’s face did not change, but Edward caught a flicker of laughter in her eyes. His heart jumped. She might be reclaimed, then? If she could be

taken out of this atmosphere, away from all this advertised conceit, if her sex could be satisfied, if her personality could be given the right kind of scope. . . . Make her act, make her write, perhaps. How would she be with a child, a child of her own? Edward longed to extricate her from sentimentalities and waste, as he looked. She leaned forward in her chair, her chin poised upon one attenuated hand: there was a charming disarray of the skirt over one silken extended foot, and her gown lapsed with a sweet half-consciousness from her throat. "Pose 21," Edward reflected, "from 'Learn from the Swan.'" He looked admiringly all the same, and meeting his gaze the girl coloured. He had not thought she would do that.

Mrs. O'Malley's Irish-French sounded in and over his thoughts like a fine wind. Looking round the room he met with an unexpected revulsion. What were they about, these people? Advertising themselves like a patent remedy. Jealous of one another all the time. Lying and scheming and conniving against one another, no doubt. Mauling one another's lives, mixing themselves nauseously up and writhing about like a pack of gluey worms. Yet there was good stuff, there ought to be good stuff, among them. Root, for instance, if only . . .

Towards the end of the paper the girl glanced meaningly at Edward, and he stole towards her. As he stood by her side, he heard her catch her breath and sigh gently. She produced a curious reed-like

rustle. As soon as Mrs. O'Malley had finished, Eunice leaned languidly to him, her lips a little apart. He was startled by a clear light tone. "Quickly! Beat Raoul. Speak, I want you to."

Her face was impassive, her lips had not moved. It was a school-girl's trick, and how well done! Edward felt a rush of delight; he leaped to the piano.

"Madame," he gasped. "Madame." He bowed low to the little woman, then turned to the company with a royal sweep of the hand. "This wonderful hour," he exclaimed in a tone of suppressed emotion. There was a sensation, people began to rustle less.— All very well, but how was he to go on? It was an hour or so ago that he had undertaken to speak, he should have prepared something, but that girl had put everything out of his head. She was looking at him now: those eyes of artificial innocence were upon him. If a woman can make a fool of a man her vanity is gratified. No matter! He pulled himself together; he would be a match for her. The room was quiet now. His pause had been of exactly the right length.

"This hour,"—Edward's tone was low, vibrant and restrained—"this hour marks an epoch in the development of literature. You, *chère madame*," he inclined his head towards the delighted lady, "you have the flame, the inner fire. It irradiates your words,—you in whose admired person,"—Mrs. O'Malley clutched Mrs. van Spless's hand—"I have to-night witnessed the indissoluble union of

the Celt and the Gaul,— the Celt mistress of poetry, the Gaul mistress of style. Madame, Ireland has need to be proud of you: we, your American and English disciples, we have need to be proud of you. More, we are grateful; we shall be grateful always.”

He paused. That seemed to have gone down all right, the women were evidently impressed, and the intellectual faint smiles of the chosen ones among the men seemed to indicate a regard for him as an ironist. And Eunice? Good Lord, he had forgotten Eunice. What kind of a lover was he? He was a rotten lover, that was what he was. The girl wore a drowsy smile, once more she was enigmatical: well, he might have expected that. Meanwhile they were all waiting for more, and he had no more to give them. He knew he would spoil the effect if he went on.— An escape! He would say it all over again in French. Few of them would be any the wiser, and those few would suppose him to be crowning his irony. His French was quite untrustworthy, but still —

“ *Comme je vous ai dit, mesdames, messieurs —*” He determined to work hard what accent he had, he would be amazingly nasal, the r’s would rattle in his throat, the u’s would be sharp and pointed like needles. “ *Comme je vous l’ai dit, cette heure, c’est une heure qui marque une vraie époque dans le développement de la littérature du monde.— C’est cette dame qui vient de nous adresser qui*

possède sans doute,— ah, mesdames, messieurs, il n'y en a pas qui peut jamais s'en douter —” (Yes, he must pad a bit, no matter what happened to his French; he couldn't sit down just yet.) “Il n'y en a pas, je l'affirme, qui pourra renier que Madame O'Malley, âme forte, âme genereuse, âme ecstatique, chérie toujours dans son cœur la flamme sacrée. . . . Qu'est-ce que c'est que je peux vous dire? Après une telle eloquence, je ne peux trouver des mots qui peuvent exprimer ce que je sens, ce que nous sentons tous. Voilà une chose, une chose seule, que j'ose dire, c'est que madame a uni le beau style français. . . .” All over again in French he said it.

Edward bowed to the applause very gravely. He turned to take up once more his station by the mantel-piece, but Mrs. O'Malley seized his hand, and drew him sturdily to her.

“Young man,” she said, “that's foine speaking. The Gaul and the Celt. That's what I loike to hear. And now you must write. Yes, you must just sit down and write. Miss Dinwiddie, I want this good lad to write an article in our first number, all about the Celt and the Gaul and my paper. He is a pote, he understands — and I know he'll do ut.”

Eunice glanced at Edward: she was evidently satisfied. It occurred to Edward that after all it was she who had been sold, and not Raoul Root, for Root had never intended to speak at all. Suppose that were to come out, suppose little Massington were to give it away that he, Edward, had offered

to speak earlier in the evening? What a jar that would be! It mustn't happen. Meanwhile it was pleasant to know that Eunice was deceived. He would often deceive her, he made up his mind to that. She was made to cozen and to be cozened.

"Of course, of course," he murmured to Mrs. O'Malley. "But your photograph must be on the same page with my article. In the middle of the same page."

Mrs. O'Malley's enchantment heightened, visibly and audibly. She sought Edward's hand again. This was, he decided, precisely the right moment for him to clear out. "Good-bye," he said. "I must write at once. I cannot wait. Good-bye, Miss Dinwiddie."

Eunice drooped. She slipped a lingering tenuous hand into his, she shrank away from him, as though his brusque adieu had been a blow. "How analyse that?" Edward thought. "Real sensitiveness in the beginning, perhaps: then it had become a bad habit and then a pretence. Could she be cured?"

"I say," he said aloud, "do you play tennis? I'm free at half past three to-morrow. You know Mitchell's Courts?"

Eunice straightened herself. "All right," she said. "I'll be there."

She spoke directly, boyishly, like an American. No "Divinity" slush here. A sudden change, perhaps, of one pose for another? Well, she was

clever. She had instantly scented his antagonism and its cause.

As Edward smiled at her, she drooped again. "You must come back with me," she said, "and tell me your beautiful dreams."

But now Edward caught again that flicker of laughter in her eyes. "You bet!" he replied gaily, and left her.

CHAPTER XXI

IT was curious, ran Edward's retrospect, that what had really interested him most during the evening was his reflection on Welsh's Russian appearance. That kind of consideration, after all, was what appealed to him. Other things were diverting, they fell into their places, they were nothing much. Mrs. van Spless's middle-aged American mind,—“mentality,” the Americans themselves would call it—Fenton's very English chatter, Root's posing, and the posings of those others,—all that was unimportant. And it was badly adjusted, clumsily put together. These gatherings were intolerable, “literary gents” shouldn't be collected like that, they ought to leave that kind of thing to usual people. Edward grew more and more irritated; he felt tired, his thoughts repeated themselves, he seemed to have lost poise. He decided not to allow himself to think of the girl, because he knew that it was impossible to be frank with himself about her, and he would not admit that he knew it. This irritated him further.

“Well, I shan't go to that kind of entertainment again,” he said to Welsh, when they had nearly reached their hotel.

"But you were splendid! you were entirely magnificent! I said you would triumph, and you did triumph. Your French! I was extraordinarily impressed."

Welsh was remarkable, thought Edward, he could be exclamatory no matter when. The panegyric continued spasmodically till they were inside the hotel doors. Edward ordered a siphon to be sent to his room. He always travelled with a flask of the whiskey he liked best.

"I'm not going to bed for half-an-hour or so." He turned to Welsh. "Will you come to my room?"

Welsh at once began to talk of Eunice. "Of course," he said, "you want me to talk of her? Tell me, will you marry her? Will you *marry* her, Mr. Raynes?"

"No." Edward took up the vein of this direct attack.

"Are you quite sure?" Welsh was disappointed. "But every time you see her you will find not being married to her harder to bear. There will be no peace for your sun-warmed flesh. Consider, my friend! To have her entirely to yourself, under your absolute control,—to be able to play with her as you liked, to torment her or to caress her, to treat her with all the sweet unreason in the world! Think of it!" His eyes danced impishly. "Why, how can you hesitate? If I were free —"

"My dear Welsh, if you were free, you'd marry

again in a month. You were born with a wedding ring on your finger. It's the plunge of marriage that appeals to you, the sensation of doing something irrevocable. No power on earth could keep you from the altar. . . . And yet no one, I admit, could be less married by marriage than you."

"Upon my soul —" Welsh hesitated. "Well, yes, you are right. You are always right, Rhadamanthus. Most dainty of Solons! I'm attracted to marriage because it's the beginning of a story. There's something so dramatic about marriage, and you never know whether the story is going to be comedy or tragedy or burlesque. Yes, I have really the same attitude towards marriage as the authors of those stories in back numbers of *The Family Herald*. You've found me out. I have no sympathy at all with these modern people who want to abolish marriage. On the contrary, I should like to abolish divorce, and so make marriage even more of an event than it is. These free unions, leasehold contracts and the rest, I can't stand them. They are frightfully dull. They are as dull as Ethical Societies. The kind of people who propose them would turn our churches into lecture halls and entertainment rooms for 'good citizens.' No, we must have religion, we must have marriage, if only to keep these dull moral ones in check. I support marriage because it is entirely immoral, and I support religion for the same reason."

"You have an extremely lazy mind." Edward

was horizontal in the depths of his chair. "Very little activity of imagination. The abolition of marriage would make certain picturesque little touches impossible, of course, but there you stop. Can't you imagine other picturesque elements that would come in, to counterbalance and more than counterbalance? Besides, change is in itself picturesque. But you can't bear to think of people not being 'landed' just as they are now, or not being unfaithful just as they are now. . . . You are, in fact, inflexible in the genuine conservative way. You only get beyond the usual conservative in speaking frankly of your prejudices, and you speak frankly because the sensation pleases you." Edward sipped his whiskey.

"Curse you! I can't stand these sledge-hammer blows. Where is some sweet Aumerle to deliver me from ruthless Bolingbroke? I can't answer you, Harry of Hereford.— But will you aim, then, at a free union with this exquisite water-nymph? Will you sport in the reeds together under the blessing of Pan, and not of Holy Church?"

"I can't say. As yet I have only got as far as asking her to play tennis to-morrow."

"Tennis! I don't like that for a beginning."

"I haven't seen her by daylight yet. That seemed the easiest way of seeing her by daylight."

"But she is so wonderfully artificial. She should never be seen except between sundown and sunrise."

"Nights are sometimes dark, and a water-nymph

can't disport herself under the electric light. She must be allowed out occasionally by day. . . . Be reasonable."

Welsh was silent. Then: "Well, anyhow," he said, "you are, it seems, taking her up?"

"I'm not sure. I don't altogether want to take her up. I confess I feel myself threatened. She would, of course, try to make me let go of a great deal that I like to have, of a great deal that's important to me, part of me, in fact. Women always do. She would say: 'Ah, but you *shan't* be yourself.' They are always fraying and worrying the edges of one's personality,—like bitch-terriers."

Welsh opened his eyes. "They don't fray and worry mine."

"Because your personality is wonderfully encased. Your subjectivity is proof against anything. You take temporary colour from everything, and permanent colour from nothing. You have a substratum that nothing can touch, and a layer of the most porous possible substance above it. My egoism has to be more on guard than yours. I have to look to my outer lines of defence."

"And I needn't, because my fort is impregnable! Impregnable! I never thought of that before. . . . Quite true. And you are the subtlest of analysts. . . . Reggie would agree with you about women."

Edward winced. "Tryers' feelings about women all resolve themselves into simple spleen. He doesn't know them, he's not attracted by them. He

throws anything at them that he can pick up. He attacks them in a feminine way. I defend myself against them as a male. I am attracted by them and I know the danger of that. It's a danger that only the harem can dispose of, but the worst of the harem is that it disposes not only of danger but of interest. The harem in the long run is deadly dull. It suits meditative Orientals, but it wouldn't suit us."

"If you don't marry Eunice, will you marry any one, do you think?" Welsh plunged back to the particular.

"I wish I knew. . . ." Edward made as if to continue, and then stopped.

"Oh, do let's discuss it! The most interesting of all subjects, and one never talked of frankly. Why does one marry, why does one not marry?" Welsh's mouth opened widely. "Tell me, what are your thoughts when you feel inclined to take a wife?"

"Oh, it's quite simple, that." Edward laughed. "Quite simple. As a bachelor I have to choose between various ways of dealing with sex, all more or less uncomfortable. I must either be continent, in which case I am continually teased. . . . And I tell myself: 'This is against your nature, it's a damned waste; you're missing something that you won't be able to get when you're older.'"

"My dear Mr. Raynes! I had no idea you were so normal as all that. Continence is just what ap-

peals to me. I ask for nothing else. I should have been a wicked priest."

"Well, no doubt that makes your life less complicated. You are to be envied. As things are arranged, it's much easier for you to live according to your abnormal nature than for me to live according to my normal one. Well . . . I can be continent, or I can be promiscuous. I can take a girl here, a girl there, all of them shared with other men, of course, however much they may swear not. Distinct danger in that, from the point of view of health, and not very satisfying, either. Involves a great deal of trouble and fatigue, as much trouble and fatigue as marriage. Then I can be even more promiscuous and patronise the streets. More dangerous, more unsatisfactory, but less troublesome, less waste of time. Then I can be a Don Juan, I can practise seduction. Not much danger to health, that, except to the girl's —"

"Oh, I don't know." Welsh spoke apprehensively. "Suppose her father or brother got hold of you. I've had some awful experiences. Quite undeserved, of course."

"You don't mean to say they went for you . . .?"

"Yes; once. I had to run."

Edward paused to contemplate and enjoy the picture. Welsh remained grave.

"You give me another disadvantage, then," Edward resumed, "to the Don Juan line of action.

Though some Don Juans might be more skilful, as well as more thorough than you. But I wasn't cut out for a seducer, either. Don't happen to be unscrupulous in that way. . . . Then, in the fifth place, we have, of course, adultery; with the Law Courts in the background. I'm not French enough to be particularly drawn to the cult of married women; but I admit there's a good deal to be said for it, in comparison, especially if the husband is complaisant."

"A wittold!" Welsh broke in. "That means a complacent cuckold. A word I have always liked. The wittold! Charming. What a subject for a painter of portraits! — But how about keeping a mistress? You haven't considered that."

"I was coming to it. Sixthly, the mistress. An old fellow I knew said to me once: 'Don't do it. All the disadvantages of matrimony, none of the advantages.' He wasn't quite right. You don't have all the disadvantages; you're generally cut off from the woman's family, and it's easier to chuck the affair than it is to get a divorce. But it is true that you're just as much bound to a mistress while you have her as you are to a wife. Have to watch her more carefully, too. She has to think of her future as a wife hasn't."

"But would you mind her intriguing with other men?"

"Yes, unless they presented me with a doctor's certificate, frequently renewed."

"You are like Panurge, my friend. That was one of his considerations. You remember. 'To marry or not to marry.' What a passage!"

"It's a consideration with every man who isn't a fool. Fear of disease accounts for a high percentage of marriages, I'm convinced of it. The answer to the old question which bank clerks and counter-jumpers think it so witty to put: 'Why keep a cow when you can get milk?' is obvious. 'Because you know the milk is pure.'"

"Oh, my dear friend! My dear Mr. Raynes!" Welsh shivered and grimaced. "Don't say such dreadful things, I implore you! These *anecdotes*,—they are terrible! They give me real pain.—And I've always disliked Brioux. The subject is distasteful to me."

"Well, I'd rather think about syphilis than get it.—Have we finished this category? After all, it doesn't interest you personally. You look, you think, you create, you are divine in your independence. You are as the Olympians, calling into being the good and the evil. . . ."

"You describe me admirably." Welsh rubbed his hands.

"You are free, I am bound."

They were silent: then Edward said suddenly and rather shyly: "You must stay with me again. The fact is, I like you, and that's something new for me, for somehow or other I have no friends. So come whenever you like."

"Of course." Welsh looked at Edward, evidently touched. "Of course. Do you really like me? I have a mania for being liked.— Yes, I think we should be happy together."

"If I could find a girl who attracted me, and whom I liked as well as I like you, I would ask her to marry me at once. But that's the difficulty. I never *like* women. They remind me of Reggie Tryers."

"I'll find you a girl to marry!" Welsh got up, much excited. "I'll find you a girl utterly different from Reggie! From now on, this is my mission, I swear it. I am consecrated to it, my friend!— And you are really sure that Eunice won't do?"

"If I'd met her five years ago, perhaps. . . . I don't think I could make anything of her now."

"How disappointing! how very disappointing! But I'll find you a girl, you'll see. What a pity that I can't become a girl for your sake. . . . How exciting! If I could only change myself to a beautiful slender exquisite female thing . . . if I could transform my meagre hairy thighs, my elderly legs. . . . You should see how I would make love! With what sweet reluctance! I have always thought that I could make love better as a girl."

"I should have to wean you from your cerebralism. Could I, do you think?"

"Oh, yes! I'm only a cerebralist as a man,— because to be anything else means action, initiative. I can't be the possessor, but of course I could be the

possessed! Don't talk of it! Too exciting, much too exciting.— But, you know, I have no sympathy whatever with what are known as Hellenic tastes. I am quite different. Those good kind fellows, Krafft-Ebing and Moll, they don't deal with my type at all. . . . How curious, when you think of it, that most people would call us men of pleasure. We are really men over whom sex has a peculiar power for making us extremely uncomfortable."

Again they were silent, and for a longer time than before.

"Marriage," said Edward at last, "is a way out of it. I recognise that. In some ways one would be freer in marriage. One would be free in a new way, and captive in a new way. Anything that is new has its appeal. But I shrink from the upheaval—the worry—so much change that would rasp. My egoism shrinks. I can't help thinking that I should be more—well, more sawed into, in the long run, than I am. It's true that I have to put up with a great deal that's inharmonious enough now; my pleasures involve me in having to say and do ridiculous unpardonable things; I have to get horribly *mixed up*: it's a game I can't play as men of a certain faculty can play it. But I'm not surrounded on every side as I should be by marriage. I can escape . . . I do escape. . . ."

He looked up and saw that Welsh was sound asleep.

"Well —" Edward said, half aloud. It was cer-

tainly time to go to bed. He began to prepare, with his usual carefulness, for cleaning his teeth; he wondered if Welsh would still be there in the morning. The dropped jaw did not disturb Edward as before. He reflected that it would be the same with the woman one married. Characteristics at first disliked would become tolerable. But, equally, much that was welcomed at first would be as time went on rejected, perhaps abhorred. This eternal balance and counterbalance — he went in too much for that. He was far too prone to weigh; it was wearisome, this addition and subtraction, this reckoning of advantages and disadvantages. Could he not, for once, do something without counting the cost? A great deal to be said, after all, for Welsh's recklessness. . . . Ah, yes, but Welsh's temperament evaded any penalty.— There it was again, this curse of seeing the other side, seeing it in this dull automatic way. Better never to see it, again like Welsh, even though, unlike Welsh, he had later on to foot the bill. "Confound it, let me have some bill to foot for a change!" He had lived at low cost for too long. He was too safe, too well-adjusted,— why, there was danger in being like that! He had talked of the risk of sawing into his personality, but why should he set such store by his personality? Did he even know what his personality was? Had he ever got at it? Had he ever dared? The reflection recurred, what value had his kind of character, the character that he had

chosen to recognise as his? But then it was all he had. If the idea of tending his "personality," of playing nursemaid to his pretty little ego, were taken away from him, what would he have left? A wife and family, perhaps: and he doubted if he had force enough to make his domestic life distinguished. . . .

He kicked off one of his shoes with some violence. Welsh woke suddenly, held up his hands, looked scared, cried "Good night!" and withdrew.

Impossible to ignore it, Edward was irritated and depressed. He remembered his journey to London two days ago, his childish expectation of something that was going to happen,—something new. . . . He had felt like that simply because he was at the mercy of sex; it was sex that led him on to one absurdity after another, sex that had fooled him about the girl in the gallery, sex that had driven him to that walk and made him go without his lunch.—Well, he had had his dinner, he had scored there at any rate. But he had not scored to-night. He had played the fool without being amused. When he came back, he had felt sick, he had vomited, using Welsh as a feather to tickle the back of his throat. But without relief; the taste in his mouth was bitter. The only satisfaction was that he had found out that he liked Welsh.

CHAPTER XXII

NEXT morning, when Edward waked, the sun was shining full into his room. He had slept, as always, soundly, and he was conscious now of a lovely languor, the languor that, after late nights and excitements, varies so deliciously the usual sensations of robust health. How very pleasant it was to feel a little off colour now and again! He lifted his bedclothes. The warm faint carnal savour gave him extreme pleasure: how attractive the flesh was! especially just before bathing. That moment was the moment of perfect ripeness, twenty-four hours from the last bath: for flesh newly-bathed lost some of the properties of flesh,—that smell of soap,—yes, one was too clean. On the other hand, one must bathe once a day, to avoid any offending hint of grossness: if Edward were to go without his bath that morning, he would cherish his fleshliness in vain, his pleasure in his body would have less fine an edge: while if he were to bathe both morning and night, his pleasure would be attenuated. Yes, he had hit, he reflected, on the right mean here. It was just so, by the no more and the no less of the daily bath, that his flesh ripened perfectly for this moment of perfection: how well he appreciated the relish of enjoyments depending, in

this way, on an equipoise that more, or less, would have destroyed! He forgot his reactions of a few hours past.

Edward lay on, in possession: in possession of the sweets of his person, in possession of the brightness and warmth and cheer of the sunlight, in possession of the pleasant objects of the room,—the green silk dressing-gown hanging over the chair by his bed, the silver-topped whiskey-flask with its case of rich dark-brown leather, the dress shirt with its thin gold cuff-links. How beautifully those links showed against the starched white linen; the crest on them had been very delicately chased. Edward's spirit possessed, with equal tranquillity and satisfaction, the engravings framed on the walls, engravings of the kind that are found in modern hotels, of Coaching Inns, scenes in the Thames valley, old London streets. They did not belong to him, they were new to him, and he liked that. He liked the room being obviously what it was, a room in an hotel of modern standards. How was it, he wondered, that you could tell at a glance that all this new, clean, sufficient furniture had come in as a fractional part of some enormous order? His eyes rested with pleasure on the writing table in the corner, with its blotting-pad stamped with the hotel's name and badge, with its wooden receptacle for paper and envelopes and telegraph forms. . . . Telegraph forms! He must use one of those, he must send a telegram to Eunice Dinwiddie. He would not play tennis with her, cer-

tainly not, why risk it? Suppose he had to wake up on mornings like this, always with a woman by his side? Why, it would spoil everything. She would talk, her observations would be irrelevant, his currents would be deflected, it would never do. He was not going to be joined on, as one cuff-link is joined to another. He was damned if his heart and another were ever going to beat as one!

He reached for his watch, and saw that it was twelve o'clock. He got out of bed, rolled a cigarette and lit it. Those pyjamas were a success; yes, it was exactly the right shade of purple, and the little gold lines were pleasing. A Paris purchase; Edward recalled the remark of the shopman when the pattern was chosen: "Ah, m'sieur, they will be so beautiful that you will have no need of a lady to sleep with you!" Quite right, he had no need.

He put on his dressing-gown while deciding that it would be better to telephone to Mrs. van Spless than to telegraph to Eunice in her care. He had no other address.— "Urgent call from London — illness of a near relative — very much regret — most kind of you if you would tell Miss Dinwiddie — my sincere apologies." That was settled, thank Heaven! But very conscientiously, guarding against contingencies, he telephoned to the Tennis Courts as well, and then exultantly called up the Hotel office with an order for coffee and rolls to be sent to his bedroom. He would breakfast lightly, then lunch at about half past two. . . . These lit-

tle details of arrangement in daily life, how full of interest and charm they were for him! Certainly he was a born bachelor.

He opened the communicating door and went to his bath. Delightful. His only annoyance was that the phrase of Browning—"Silver shock"—came to his mind as he turned on the douche. Why no phrase of his own? Why had he himself been elbowed thus out of reach? None the less the bath was delightful: and Edward consoled himself by the reflection that he was critical enough to see that "silver shock" was not really a good phrase, that there was something superficial and muddled about it, just as there was about Browning's philosophy. The French genius would never tolerate a phrase of that kind.

Soon after the coffee and rolls came Reggie Tryers. Welsh followed, evidently harassed, evidently looking for a way out.

"Breakfast!" Tryers cried. "Why, I'm beginning to be hungry for lunch."

"There's a restaurant round the corner." Edward did not raise his eyes. "There is always a restaurant round the corner." He broke a roll.

Tryers walked about the room, examining the pictures, while Welsh sat down timidly on the edge of the bed, and Edward ate in silence.

"Welsh has been telling me all about last night." Tryers spoke very quickly and resolutely. "What were your impressions, Raynes? Any impressions

worth having? — It's really waste of time, isn't it, meeting people of that sort? — I rather like these engravings. — I should like to introduce you to my Sydney friend, Hubert Reeves. He has real force of character. In fact, he's the most influential man of his kind in Sydney. He has done more real work there than any one else. He will be spoken of as 'Reeves of Sydney,' later on, just as one speaks of 'Arnold of Rugby.' A remarkable man. Of course Welsh is too narrow to appreciate him, but you would, Raynes, I'm sure you would. We sail together in two or three weeks' time. . . . I've been awfully busy since I saw you. Not a moment to myself. There's so much to be discussed, so many arrangements to be made —"

He moved about perpetually as he spoke, fixing first one object and then another with an intense gaze, touching the picture-frames and the mirrors and the backs of the chairs, and talking, talking, all the while. There was something animal about this inordinate, meaningless activity. Edward wanted to let him out, to turn him loose for a run, as you would a dog that had not been exercised. Evidently it was painful to Tryers not to be getting rid of his emotional surplus. Edward found his presence increasingly disagreeable; he reminded him of a cow urgently in need of being milked. . . . Humane, perhaps, to attempt the required office.

"How about that ridiculous religion of yours?" Edward remarked, as he poured his coffee.

Tryers stood transfixed. Welsh gasped in amazement.

"Well, well; how about it? Does it console you for your failure with little Norah?"

"You — you're a cad!" Tryers' eyes were angry: he clenched his hands.

"Why?"

"To insult a man's religion!"

"I can't. Your religion is ridiculous, because it isn't a religion."

"Why do you call it a religion, then?"

"Because I'm eating my breakfast. Let's take time, then, to call it a make-believe religion, or a pseudo-religion."

"And what right, pray, have you to say that mine is a pseudo-religion, or that it is ridiculous? How do you know?"

"Because I know that you are ridiculous."

"How dare you say that?"

"Don't make him too angry. Don't go too far, Mr. Raynes.— I beg you!" Welsh gesticulated entreaties from the bed.

"I'm simply stating my opinion. I've a right to do that. Tryers needn't be angry, unless he wants to be."

"I am angry, naturally, when your opinions are so insulting — so unjust. To say that I become religious —"

"Pseudo-religious."

"— because I failed in — in sinning."

“Yes, and you always will. You put it very well. The point is, though, that your mistake was to fail, not to sin. But having failed, you said, ‘I will sin no more,’ instead of ‘I will fail no more.’ And now that you are what you call religious, you’ll fail just the same, and simply because you won’t think clearly, because you won’t put your finger on the right spot.”

“Very well,” Tryers clenched his teeth, “you will see.”

“I don’t think I shall. I know so well the kind of thing that will happen. The fact is, Tryers, that your failures as a sinner interested me a little, but your failures as a saint won’t interest me at all. I have no intention of keeping you up now.”

Tryers sat down. He collapsed.

“Very well, then,”—he was pale—“you don’t wish to know me any more. All right.”

“My dear Mr. Raynes,” Welsh addressed Edward in a tone of humble intercession, “this is—really it is—rather cruel of you. You don’t consider the chagrin—the peculiar chagrin to Reggie—of losing one of his circle of acquaintances—”

“Shut up!” Tryers interrupted fiercely. “I don’t want you coming in. I can look out for myself, I—”

“You don’t know how he clings to his friends. There is something pathetic about the way he clings. I find it a nuisance myself, sometimes, but I recognise a certain virtue—”

"You!" Tryers trembled with indignation.

"And besides, he's going to Australia so very soon. Don't you think, just for a week or two, you might possibly —?"

"Will you be quiet?" Tryers approached Welsh with a gesture more than hostile enough to make the latter raise his hand. "Have you both insulted me enough, may I ask?"

"Certainly," Edward assured him. "I want to write telegrams. Jack, we are going this afternoon to Liverpool."

"Liverpool! Why are you going to Liverpool?" Tryers was shrill, he almost screamed.

Welsh was much excited. "This afternoon!" he exclaimed. "Well, why not? Why not this afternoon? Tom will be delighted to see us. And Ethelle, we shall meet with Ethelle! What an idea! — But I thought you were going to play tennis with Eunice Dinwiddie."

"Oh, no. Not to-day. That's all right."

"I thought you said this afternoon —?"

"It's all right." Edward spoke rather impatiently. "Must one always keep all engagements? I have telephoned."

"What unscrupulousness!" Welsh was overjoyed. "I never should dare —"

"Well, you'll come?"

"Of course. *Of course*. Reggie, you, I suppose, will hardly —?"

"I should not think of coming." Tryers, with

tilted head and flushed cheeks, walked to the door.

"And now," said Edward, "we'll write the telegrams. My landlady lives in Bold Street." Tryers had turned; he scrutinised Edward. "You know Bold Street?" Welsh rubbed his hands. "I'm sure she'll have a room for each of us, and a sitting-room. She was expecting me rather later in the month. We will have a little supper party. I'll telegraph to a girl I know, and you'll telegraph to Ethel. Here's a form. Hurry up. The train leaves at two something."

"I'll telegraph, my friend, I'll telegraph at once. I'll get Ethelle. I wonder how you'll like her! She is tall and blonde — the North German type, rather. A thin girl, a consumptive, thin flushed cheeks. A long thin body, and oh, such long emaciated legs!"

"Yes, I remember you're attracted by bony girls."

"You are shameless!" cried Tryers from the door. "You are shameless and gross!"

"Oh, I thought you had gone." Edward did not look up.

"Do you mean to say there's any romance —?"

"My dear Tryers, one doesn't always want romance. Why be bound down to romance? Try to 'see life steadily, and see it whole.'— Well, Jack, what is this Ethel's point of view?"

"*Ethelle*. She always calls herself *Ethelle*.— Oh, she has the most amazing ideas. She will amuse you. She has spirit, she has wit, she has real courage. She knows she's dying, and she defies the uni-

verse. A Dostoevsky type. Oh, you will admire her audacity!"

"Well, write your telegram. I'm afraid my girl is quite normal. She certainly won't suit you. She's dark, small, rather like some Goyas, with a plebeian passion for pleasure that I enjoy. But not in Dostoevsky's line at all. The two will be in contrast. It may be interesting."

"What does she do?" Welsh evidently hoped for the worst.

"Oh, Betty's respectable, according to their code. My taste doesn't happen to be for the kind of girl who is, as they say, 'no good.' She works in a milliner's shop. Frightfully long hours, but when she's out, she really lives. I thought of setting her free; but she's happier as she is."

"Respectable!" Welsh was downcast. "But think of the appeal of the genuine prostitute! She is by far the most interesting — she is the slave!" He shouted ecstatically. "The manacled, scourged slave! She has lost everything,—even sex itself. Yes, it is because she is drained of sex that her appeal is so irresistible."

Edward went on writing his telegrams. Tryers still hesitated by the door.

"You are entirely mistaken in my character," he said emphatically. "You will see."

"All right. Welsh will no doubt keep me informed.— You'll tell me, Jack, won't you, if any unexpected developments occur in Tryers' case?"

Tryers cast a glance of hatred upon Welsh, made as though to speak, and then left them.

“He’d kill us if he could!” Welsh exclaimed.

“Twelve words does it exactly,” said Edward with satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXIII

TOM FIELDING was to meet them at Lime Street Station. "Lime Street!" Welsh ejaculated as the train drew near. "Lime Street! What associations! Lime Street and the Landing Stage!" He burst into rhyme:

"At Lime Street and the Landing Stage,
There age meets youth and youth meets age!
What lies are told,
By young and old,
At the Lime Street Station and the Landing Stage!"

His excitement had quickened at Edge Hill. He had invoked Edge Hill with the same kind of enthusiasm. "Think of the scores of mean streets, the hundreds of mean houses and mean shops! There is nothing so attractive to me as a mean shop, — the kind of shop at which little ragged girls buy fried fish. Oh, you won't do away with mean shops, Edward Raynes, will you, in your reconstruction of the universe? Leave us our mean shops!"

By the time the train stopped Welsh's exaltation was beyond control. His eyes flamed, his lips parted widely, he was trembling.

"There he is!" he cried, waving his hands in the

air. "There's old Tom!" He sprang out and dashed along the platform to his friend, whom he encircled with both arms. "God bless you, Tom, God bless your heart!" Fielding's natural embarrassment escaped him altogether. "This is Mr. Edward Raynes," he gave a wide sweep of the hand, "the wisest philosopher, the most massive mind, in Europe! — I present you to Mr. Tom Fielding, the Julius Cæsar of the cotton markets of Liverpool. So the two most intransigent individualists of our age encounter: here on the platform of Lime Street Station!"

They shook hands. "For God's sake, Jack," said Fielding, "don't make such a song about it. One of the fellows from the Office is meeting this train."

Fielding was a man of between thirty and forty, about middle height, solidly built in North Country style. His eyes were of an unusually deep fine blue, and gave the impression of being habituated to a survey of great spaces. He was wearing a blue suit and a blue tie,—the tie of a more vivid tint than the suit, well chosen for it. His nose was assuredly Roman. Edward, who was always on the lookout for noses in men, at once admired this feature, especially after his disappointments at Mrs. van Spliss's the night before. A man with a nose like that, so straight, so decisive, so clear, must have fibre, he reflected, must have independence and resistance and command. Yes, he would rather live with Fielding

than with Raoul Root or Massington. Fielding's mouth struck him, too. It was a large mouth, with nervous lips, a mouth that contradicted the nose, and Edward liked such physical contradictions.

They walked along the platform. Welsh was for the moment subdued by his friend's protest. "Forgive me, forgive me," he was saying in a pathetic undertone. "I know, Tom, that I am always putting you to shame. Tom Fielding,"—he turned to Edward—"believes in outward conformity. You see how beautifully he is dressed, without fleck or stain.—Oh, I have news for you, Tom. What do you think, my friend, what do you think? Reggie Tryers has become an Anglican. He's going to lead a pure life and build a church in Australia. What do you think of that?"

"I think," replied Fielding, "that it pays the beggar." The word that he actually used was pronounced with a North Country accent. "Come and have a drink in the Refreshment Room."

Welsh insisted that there was not time. They must take a tramcar to Bold Street at once, or the girls would be there before them. Edward suggested a taxi, but Welsh would not hear of that. "No, no,—a car. We always take the car in Liverpool. The Bold Street car." He smacked his lips. "Who is to be your companion, Tom, for our supper party? Rosa or Maggie or little Mabel?—Rosa: ah, I'm glad you have chosen Rosa. What an adventurer you are, with these married

women! I suppose her husband is away 'placing orders' in Leeds or Huddersfield or Bolton. Those places were created solely for husbands to go off to, on the right occasions. But you don't care, bless your heart, *where* husbands are. Rosa has such a bewitching simplicity of mind; when she is with you, she is like a dear little child enjoying a holiday.— Yes, Rosa was the right choice —"

CHAPTER XXIV

EDWARD'S landlady was exuberant on her threshold. She pressed and held Fielding's hand with continental fervour. "And all these weeks," she cried, "these long weeks, and you do not come! It ees not kaind. But I forgive — always, always, I forgive!"

"Oh," said Edward, "so you —"

"Oh, *yais!* Mr. Tom and I — Oh, *yais*, *yais!*"

"Madam W. doesn't introduce her friends," Fielding observed.

"But I know this lady too," exclaimed Welsh. "You remember, Madame, when you lived in Lord Nelson Street — two years ago, I think."

"Oh, *yais*, I remember." The woman turned to him, very arch and sly. "Oh, such a wicked gentleman! Such wicked eyes!" She broke into high-pitched trills of nervous laughter. "I am vary much surprised, Mr. Tom, that such a wicked, wicked gentleman should be a friend of you. I must look to you better. And you, Mr. Edward," — she darted an amorous glance at him — "how did you come by such a vary naughty company? Why, look you at his wicked eyes and his wicked, wicked mouth!"

Eet is scho-king, scho-king! I have so much shame for this vary naughty gentleman!"

Welsh was immensely flattered. He opened his mouth in a wide grin of pleasure, showing all his teeth; he leaned back his head, and emitted an inarticulate satisfaction. "Ha! ha!" he ejaculated. Edward admired the woman's instinct. How capitally she had hit on just the way of getting at Welsh's vanity! He recalled Mrs. van Spless's salutation of the night before. No wonder Welsh preferred people who were not respectable, no wonder he turned with relief from drawing-rooms to Madame's disreputable parlour.

"There will be no old gentleman from Boston here to-night." Edward addressed the lecturer in an undertone.

"Thank God!" cried Welsh. "No literary ladies, no artists, no poets, no people of any distinction whatever! Only little girls who love pleasure, — children of nature. Ah, my friend, we come to-night to the Thing Itself. Here are the roots of philosophy. Unaccommodated man and woman! Here we strip from us all shams and simulacra and chimærae! We sophisticated ones are no longer sophisticated. Primitive emotion, the atavistic thrill, the Thing Itself! Unaccommodated man!"

Fielding put a restraining hand on his shoulder. "Look out," he said. "If there are any other people here, you may startle them. They'll think there's some row on."

"Ah, he talk so well, he has beautiful talk. I will keess the wicked gentleman for his beautiful talk." Madame flung her arms round Welsh, and their noses collided. She laughed again, at some length. Her laughter had a curious, not very pleasing, thick liquid quality: it always reminded Edward of yellow jelly not fully jellified.

"This is the room, isn't it?" Edward led the way and opened the door. He saw that Madame had done her best. The evening was turning chilly, so she had made them a pleasant little fire. A luxuriant tongue was at one end of the table, a plump chicken at the other, and in the middle a plate of fruit.

"Well done!" Edward commended. Madame's face broke in rapid ripples of pleasure.

"Ah!" she panted as she spoke, in a way peculiar to her, indicative, it seemed, of exaggerated eagerness and childlike spirit. "Ah, how much more I would do for your beautiful hair! But I must not say that: he do not laike compliments,—no, never! I must not say pretty things to him."

"Never mind," said Fielding. "Say them to me instead."

"Ah, you laff at me if I say them to you. You tease me!"

"But, my dear lady," Welsh broke in, "what an excellent room! What admirable preparations! That chicken! Can I, do you think I can eat it?" He shut his eyes and made a horrible grimace. Ma-

dame shrieked. Edward patted her shoulder with a reserved and distant air.

"Could you make us," he asked, "a little salad? Your salads are always remarkable. That is because you are not English."

"Oh, you are so *kaind*! You —"

"With plenty of oil; real Olive Oil, not that cottonseed mixture. Tomatoes, lettuce very fresh and green, a little celery; but you know all about it."

Madame looked up joyfully to the large coloured print of King Edward the Seventh which decorated one of the walls. "I will make it at once," she quavered. "Ah, I will make it vary well,— you will see!"

"What an exquisite tablecloth!" Welsh plied her with fresh praise. "You are magnificent, Madame; I consider you a genius, a mistress of your art! I commend you, my friend, I commend you! I have never seen a table spread with greater delicacy and refinement. Your taste is amazing!"

"You laff at me, you bad gentleman!" She shook her finger at him, flushing with delight. "You poke funny —"

"Let's see our bedrooms," Edward interrupted. "I want a wash, and we haven't much time. Oh, and tell me too, how about drinks?"

"Ach — but I dared not, dear Mr. Edward, I dared not buy wine for *you*. I have only a bottle of Vermouth; and there is wheesky."

"Well. Mr. Fielding, what wine will you drink?"

"There is only one wine on these occasions," said Welsh eagerly. "Port. We always drink Port. Isn't that so, Tom?"

"Well,"—Fielding replied diffidently—"I think the girls enjoy Port."

"Of course they do. Of course!" Welsh leered with a fantastic curl of his lips. "That is what we all think, that the girls enjoy Port, that we enjoy their enjoying it! Let's all go out and buy what they enjoy for our enjoyment. Come on! Round the corner, to the Bodega!"

Edward decided that nothing would persuade him to drink Port through his supper, but he made no objections. The three went out together, dismissing Madame to her salad. They returned, each bearing a bottle wrapped up in brown paper; Edward's, however, was a bottle of Chambertin. Welsh's spirits seemed evaporated; he had become grave, he looked almost care-worn. Fielding said very little, and Edward made no effort to break silences. It struck him, as they walked back, that the spectacle they presented was ironically absurd. Three men, in procession,—for Welsh had stalked on, and Fielding at that moment was lagging behind,—each carrying a bottle, silent, preoccupied, going about their business of pleasure. "For every man hath business or desire, such as it is." Hamlet's melan-

choly must have been at its profoundest when he said that. "Such as it is." Well, well. And the bottle of Chambertin, Edward certainly could not be optimistic about that. No date, no indications, a dangerously low price; but all they could give him. "My Chambertin,—such as it is! My pleasures, such as they are! And my intellect, such as it is, always trotting off to Shakespeare and others."

The three men fell into line. Edward looked at Welsh, whose expression now was, like that of Keats's charioteer, "fearfully intent." He was not troubled evidently, by Edward's dissatisfactions.

CHAPTER XXV

THE children of nature arrived, one by one, between eight and nine. Ethelle came first, in a huge picture-hat and a bright yellow blouse. She was painted and powdered,—distastefully meretricious to Fielding, Edward felt. The girl immediately displayed the greatest devotion to Welsh: she sat on a footstool by his chair, and played tenderly with his abnormal worsted socks. Repeatedly she addressed him as “dear ’eart”; her voice seemed to tremble with genuine emotion. Edward decided that she was enjoying herself immensely, that this was an orgy of sentiment rarely found in her way, and, when found, famishingly sopped up. He listened, fascinated, to her talk, which evoked exactly the atmosphere of a serial story of a servants’ magazine.

“Oh, and when your telegram come, you’ll never know, dear ’eart, just ’ow it made me feel. Well, I know I’m foolish-like, but the way I come over all queer! I ’ad to put me ’and to me ’eart this way, and me ’eart was going pit-pat, ’ammer an’ tongs, something fierce. Believe me, dear ’eart, an’ all because of you, naughty boy, who don’t really care a brass farthing about poor little Ethelle. Look at

'im," she appealed to Edward and Fielding, "you can see 'e don't care, now, can't you?"

Welsh's aspect, as Edward looked, was difficult to interpret. His eyes were keen and bright and fixed, as though preoccupied with some distant object, the visualising of which demanded extreme concentration: his mouth, on the other hand, was lax and dropped,—vacuous, as though all energies had been apathetically dismissed. One of his hands rested tentatively just above the girl's knee, which he kept pressing gently in a queer mechanical way; the other hand held a thin strand of her yellow hair, twisting and untwisting it with a slow and regular motion of its hard knotted fingers. Edward had not realised before the appearance of age in Welsh's hands. They were so dry, so bony, so withered, that they might have belonged to a man of seventy.

"He cares," said Edward solemnly, "more than you can ever know."

"Oh, do you think so? You don' say. An' do you think so reelly, now? You ain't sayin' that just to give me 'ope of 'im, now, are you?" She coughed the thin apologetic aristocratic cough of the consumptive; her cheeks flushed under the paint. "You wouldn't believe it, would you, how proper foolish I am about '*im*. Why, now, other men, I don't give a snap of me finger for 'em; they're dirt. I'd send any of 'em down the spout, God's truth an' I would. But 'e's different, 'e knows I'm '*uman*, that's where it is. 'E knows —" she reached with

difficulty after expression, "well, 'e treats me like a lady!" She burst into tears and gave spasmodic hugs to Welsh's waist.

"If you like a boy you shouldn't tell him so," Fielding remarked.

"Get on. I can tell *'im*. 'E ain't no soft Archie like the rest of 'em. I tell you, 'e's different. 'E's no end clever,—proper clever 'e is," she added with pride. "You should 'ear 'im speak 'is verses. Lovely, they are,—loverly. 'E made me cry last time, straight 'e did. There ain't *no one* like *'im*."

"We're in the way," said Fielding. "Let's go upstairs." He seemed rather nervous.

When they were outside he communicated his apprehensions to Edward. "Always a mistake, bringing girls together who don't know one another. You never can tell what will happen. They take dislikes, and it may be the devil. And this Ethelle, any one can see she isn't straight. She's on the game. My girl isn't a fool. She'll spot that. She's one of the best, Rosa is, takes everything easy, never makes a fuss. Still, I don't like it: it's not fair to her."

"What can we do about it?" Edward was sympathetic.

"I don't know. We're in for it, now. I must speak to Rosa first. She's a brick, all right. Will your girl mind, do you think?"

Edward recognised the tact of the inquiry and replied that though Betty was respectable, she too was

easy-going and not likely to stand on her dignity. Fielding was not convinced.

"You don't know," he said. "Girls aren't often easy-going about things like that. They may pretend to be, but they aren't. One has to consider their feelings. Welsh doesn't understand. He's a curious beggar about women. Gets hold of the most awful rotters, seems to like them the best. It beats me. I believe in giving a wide berth to girls who are on the game. Too blooming dangerous."

"Not for Welsh, though."

"Yes, I know. He's a funny beggar. He has extraordinary insight about women in some ways; he's up to all sorts of subtleties that most men would never think of, but he doesn't understand the simple things in the least. He was trying to make up a match between one of our chaps at the Office and a girl I know over in New Brighton,— nice girl, quite straight,— and what do you think he said to her? 'You'll get him,' he said; 'he's in a state of mind just now when he's bound to marry.' What do you think of that for a mug? Yet he goes as deep as Ibsen or Strindberg or any of those fellows sometimes. Too much of a Feminist for me, though . . . more like Ibsen than Strindberg."

Edward was interested. He wondered what Rosa would be like, and imagined Fielding greeting her with courtesy and reserve, as though she were a neighbour calling on his wife. She would be a plump cheerful-looking little woman, plump, but not

too plump. She would have figure, yes, she would have curves, she would be soft but not shapeless. Like a sleek, pretty, deceitful cat. One would figure the voluptuous padded paws stretched out in lazy ecstasy. One would see the rosy relishing tongue lapping its forbidden milk.— The typical adulteress.— Entirely a female creature, just of the sort to appeal to a man whose nose proclaimed him so entirely male.

The front door bell rang. "I expect that's Rosa." Fielding's face lightened. "She's generally pretty punctual. Beats other women there, too. Not near so many of their damned conventions —"

"Yes: Welsh thinks that when you get away from the upper classes you get away from conventions. But you only get to another set of them. I was telling him that the other day." Edward spoke listlessly, rather sadly. He still felt depressed.

They went down. Edward kept in the background, while the lovers exchanged a greeting that struck him as peculiarly frank, direct, happy and innocent. Fielding kissed Rosa, drawing her to him, and she put her hand in his, laughing boyishly, calling "Hulloa, Tom!" as over sand-castles on a salt-breathing shore. She was astonishingly clear and fresh; she seemed born for the open. Her eyes were friendly, full of mischievous cheer, eyes that it seemed would seek out simple things of harmless entertainment, and find them on instinct, without fail. Edward wanted to set her by Eunice, to see which of

the two would triumph. Rosa caught his glance, she bit her lips in a sudden childlike way. Edward could not associate her with anything but childlike pleasures. How smooth and unsullied her skin was! He liked her, but she did not stir him at all. Fielding said something to her in an undertone and she laughed again. She went merrily upstairs with her paramour, who made Edward known to her as they passed.

Edward could not help feeling rather overcome. Perhaps Welsh wasn't such a fool with his "children of nature," after all. He himself, rather, had been the fool, with those anticipations of Rosa. But how to guess these things? The unfaithful wife of a Liverpool commercial traveller, a woman with several children, a woman of past thirty, and yet — there she was! What could you do when people were so preposterously out of tally with their designations?

He went back to the parlour. Welsh and Ethelle were in exactly the same positions as before, but it was Welsh who was talking now.

"Do you believe," he was saying, "that you have a soul? I tell you no. No: no: no." He tapped her forehead three times: she looked bewildered, distressed. "You have love, you have fear, you have tears, but you have not hate; and without hate there is no soul. Edward Raynes, my friend, this girl is the pure Christian type, she has all the Christian virtues. Humility, grief, cowardice, altruistic passion,

devotion; yes, she has them all, *all*. But when Christianity came the soul died. When Christianity came it was a sign that the soul was dead. No Christian can have a soul!" he shouted. "The soul has pride and hate and scorn. I see you,"—he stared at her in a fierce rapture—"I see you beaten down, crushed, drained dry, cheated of your last breath,—put away, *put away!* Ha!"

He grinned and grimaced: the terrified girl shrieked; she burst into shaking sobs. Fielding flung open the door.

"What the deuce —?" he exclaimed. "Why, what's up, Ethelle?"

"All right, Tom, it's all right!" Welsh sprang to his feet. "Son of Nietzsche, be not disturbed! Who was it that said: 'When you go to see a woman, take a whip'? Ah, I have you there. I take my whip, and you don't. What, Tom, what? Scourges and scorpions lie under my tongue. Why, Tom, why! Would you grudge us these dear little diversions with our dear little trulls?"

"'E says I'm a coward," Ethelle faltered between her diminishing sobs. "I ain't a coward, Tom; I ain't afraid of nobody. I wouldn't let no one talk at me that way, 'cept 'im, 'e knows that." She extended her little, damp, scented, screwed-up handkerchief, and blew her reddening nose.

"Look here." Fielding drew Welsh aside. "I've made it all right with Rosa; you know what a good sort she is. Now if it was some other girls I

know,— but — well, you might be a bit careful.”

“What!” Welsh’s voice was high-pitched. “Madam Bovary shrinks from the contact of Sonia! Where is she, Tom, where is she?”

“Upstairs, doing her hair. Don’t be a bally ass. She won’t shrink; she’s not one to shrink.” Edward thought of that other one, who so pre-eminently was.

“In your bedroom, Tom?” Welsh shouted still. “Your bedroom! Or in mine? Or in the bedroom of Mr. Edward Raynes? Or perhaps under the protection of the cheerful and devoted lady of the house?”

Fielding laughed. “All right, Jack,” he said. “Go on. I don’t trouble.”

The front door opened, and Edward went to greet Betty. She embraced him heartily, as a schoolgirl embraces a benevolent uncle. Edward, remembering that equal embrace just witnessed, was vexatiously touched. Still, Betty was much younger than Rosa. He balanced, as usual.

The girl drew back, catching her breath. “Oh,” she said, glancing into the room, “you have got company to-night, and no mistake!”

“Friends of mine,” Edward rejoined. “Don’t be afraid of them.”

He looked at her with approving pleasure, she was so light and keen, so nicely and prettily got up. She wore a peaked cap, like a gnome’s, a cap of blue leather, and a blue straight dress, with a wide white collar. Her hair, very dark and straight, was

blocked over her ears, reminding Edward of the hair of a mediæval boy. He was stirred, as he looked, by her queer crooked mouth, her very pointed chin; while the warm, nervous touch of her tiny hands gave him a physical glow. Her hands were stubby, like the hands of an elf that grubs in the earth; they were the hands of a stunted proletarian girl; they meant youth and toil and snatched pleasure.

"Come," said Edward, drawing his arm under hers, "they won't be ready for supper for a few minutes." His heart was beating, the words struggled in his throat.

They went upstairs in silence. When they reached the landing he caught her and lifted her off her feet. His eyes darkened, he kissed her again and again, till her lips and his were white. Her eyes shone wet under the lowered gas.

"That's what I wanted, Betty," he said, drawing a deep breath.

"I think you did." She smiled and clutched at his hand. "That's proper kissing!" Edward's eyes darkened again. He put her hair back from her forehead. "Oh," she said, with a provocative little frown, "don't make me look like bald Jane." She slid away from him. "Which room shall I go to?" she asked. "No, you wait for me here while I put my hair straight."

She came down in a few minutes without her cap, kissed him casually, and they went down together. In the supper room Rosa chattered buoyantly to

Fielding, who was enjoying her with quiet zest, and looked years younger; while Ethelle, manifestly on her dignity, extremely erect, was behaving like a lady at the other end of the room with her companion. "I don't feel 'ungry a bit, y'know," she was saying as Edward and Betty came in, "me appetite 'asn't bin what you might call grand for a long time." Welsh was silent and absorbed, hunched up, with his eyes fixed on the ground, unresponsive to all observations, but the appearance of Edward and his little friend roused him from meditation. He rose and hurried to them.

"Ha, so this is Betty. What a dainty little creature! What a delicate little epicene! Well done, my friend, well done!" He opened his mouth and brought his alarming stare upon the girl, who shrank from him, laying her hand on Edward's arm.

"This friend of mine," Edward reassured her, "is a poet. A great poet," he added, taking a leaf out of Welsh's book. "Don't be afraid of him."

Edward then presented Betty to Ethelle, with a formality that he knew would flatter the street-girl. Fielding took Betty in approvingly, and warmly grasped her hand. He looked at her with a deliberate kindliness, a kindliness that was, you might think, pigeonholed for his friends' girls. His attitude towards Betty seemed to spring up at once: there it was, professed, primed and accoutred. Rosa smiled at the girl with the freemasonry of a playmate, and took up her talk again.

"So she made love to you, Tom, did she?" she was saying. "Poor old Tom, what a way to treat you!" She leaned back, laughing, and pinched his arm. "Couldn't you defend yourself?"

"Defend myself?" Fielding put on a woful air. "What was I to do? My pal left me in the lurch, went off with his girl, and there was I alone with Madam W."

"Trust Auntie dear not to miss a chance like that!"

"No way out. Defend myself! I wish you'd been there! She fell on me. And then when that devil Cyril came back, and I told him about it, all he said was: 'I'm very sorry, Tom.' 'Very sorry!' And after all the misery I'd been through! 'Very sorry!' So was I, by gum."

"Never you mind, Tom. I ought to be about to look after you. Who'll be your next girl, eh? Mind you get some one who's a good protector."

"No next girl for me." Fielding was decisive. "You're my last love, Rosa."

"I'd rather be your last love than your first."

Welsh started. "Extraordinary!" he broke his silence. "Who was it wrote that? Goethe? Dumas? Some man of immense genius. You see, Edward Raynes, what we find in Liverpool. Imagine any one talking like Goethe at Mrs. van Spless's! I tell you, this is the real thing, this is what matters, this is the bedrock of Life."

"I don't fancy 'er kind of talk." Ethelle, quite

ignorant of Welsh's drift, whispered him. "Silly of me, ain't it? But some'ow it ain't my style. Not nice. She don't talk respectable."

Welsh did not respond. Betty was rather shyly confiding her amusement to Edward.

"What!" Rosa had gone on talking to Fielding. "Didn't you hear about the woolly vest?"

Ethelle's back straightened in protest.

"Oh, *I* didn't!" cried Welsh. "Do tell us. We must hear about the woolly vest."

Ethelle relapsed, but she still looked pained and hurt.

"Such a time as we had." Rosa addressed the company. "Our girl Vera — you know Vera, Tom — Vera and her soldier boy! Got a cigarette, Tom? — I and Olive caught her nicely. Came back home before she expected, you see. And what do you think we heard him saying? 'Where's my woolly vest, Vera?' So solemn as he was about it. 'Where's that woolly vest? I can't find my woolly vest, and I've looked everywhere.' My word, the way he swore and carried on! And she said,— quite peevish, she was,— she says, '*I* don't know where you put your old woolly vest, Li-o-nel.'"

Rosa broke off, put her cigarette down, and covered her flushed face with her hands. Her laughter pleased Edward. He thought it quite captivating; sincerely gay. Ethelle regarded her with moral disapprobation.

"Go on!" Welsh rubbed his hands. "I en-

visage this garment as a strange animate creature, a wandering insect, a Gargantuan caterpillar. Well done, my pretty sailor boy! Go on!"

"The way we teased that poor girl about it afterwards. 'Well, Vera, and has he found his woolly vest?' 'I wouldn't go with boys who lose their woolly vests, soft Jimmies like that!' You should have seen her colour up! Good night!"

"Come on," Fielding broke a pause, "let's start in and have some grub." Standing at one end of the table, he began to cut up the chicken. "That's right," said Welsh, as though in a dream. "Very good, Tom, very good." Edward took a couple of bottles and unscrewed their corks. The atmosphere became touched with gravity and restraint as they all sat round the table. Even Rosa was a trifle pensive. Ethelle and Betty eyed one another furtively. Fielding went on carving the chicken, Edward poured out the pseudo-Port, and then helped himself to the still more pseudo-Chambertin, which he smelt absently, with a doleful air. There came a knock at the door, and Madame appeared with the salad.

"Ach!" she exclaimed at once, with her laugh. "You 'ave all come? How naice, how vary naice! And zees sweet leetle gal—" She put the salad on the table and shot out her hand to Betty. "She ees my favourite, oh, yais, she ees, she know that I jus' lofe her to death." She clutched the girl with one hand and caressed her hair with the other. "Oh,

eef I was a mahn, would I not 'ave 'er for my leetle sweetheart!"

"Ha!" cried Welsh, waking up. "This is interesting. Ha! And could you get me, do you think, my dear lady, five eggs, five raw eggs?"

Madame threw up her hands. "I haf not von aig in ze 'ouse!"

"Impossible!" Welsh stared wildly at her. "But I must have them. I beg of you, I entreat you, find me some eggs."

"These hardships of ours," murmured Edward.

"Go out and get him his eggs," said Fielding.

"My word!" exclaimed Ethelle. "Fancy eatin' eggs raw. Makes me come over funny inside to think of it." Betty giggled.

"My dear lady," Welsh attacked again, "it will be appalling if I have no eggs. I implore you, do your best for me. I shall be in your debt forever." He extended half a crown, which Madame dubiously accepted.

"It ees so vary late."

"What matter? Go to the neighbours, ring back door bells, here, there, everywhere. Thorough bush, thorough briar! At any cost. You hear me, Madame, at *any* cost!"

"Well, zen,—I will try, but —"

"Clear out and get the eggs, and hurry up about it." Fielding had her out of the room in a twinkling.

"My dear Tom," Welsh protested, "how extremely abrupt —!"

"There's only one way of getting some women to go," Fielding explained, "empty 'em out like a pail of slops."

"Oh, Tom!" Ethelle's gentility suffered another shock. "But then, dear 'eart," she turned to Welsh, "we know 'e don't reelly mean it when 'e talks that way. As if 'e wasn't reelly the kindest —"

"I'm not so sure," Rosa interjected with some feeling. "The most of women don't deserve no better. A sneaky interfering tale-bearing set of hussies,—eh, Tom?" She changed her expression, smiled at him, looked debonair.

"I'm sure," retorted Ethelle, with weighted dignity: the word "hussies" had stung her, "I'm sure I 'ope you ain't passin' any personal remarks, Miss — Miss —"

"Mrs.," corrected Rosa, with an engaging flicker of the eyelid. "Me and my old man." She took Fielding's arm.

"Dear little girl!" Welsh patted Ethelle's shoulder. "How exquisite you are when you look as if you were going to cry!" She was pacified at once. "There, there." He stroked her hair. "Eat your chicken: drink your Port: let me help you to some salad."

"Salad?" Ethelle surveyed Madame's confec-

tion disdainfully. "Not me idea of salad at all. No, thank you, Jack."

Nothing would induce her to touch it. She seemed to feel that eating anything to which she was not used would make her ridiculous. Welsh began to take an interest in teasing her.

"Naughty girl!" he cried. "What perversity! Why, this is Queen Mary's favourite summer dish; nothing else is ever served at the garden-parties of the aristocracy! Yet you reject it! It was invented by that master epicure, Emile Zola —"

"Well, and who's she?" Ethelle queried sharply.

"She was Napoleon's favourite, she demoralised him completely, I'm afraid she did. In fact it was really because of her that he was so much off colour at the end,— Waterloo and all that. But she was unequalled. What a child of pleasure! And this salad was her masterpiece! Do try it."

"Chuck it, Jack," Fielding remonstrated. "Let the girl be."

"Ah-h." Welsh drew a deep breath. "But when she cries,— when she cries! O everlasting spirit of the Marquis de Sade! Don't you want her to be stirred, Tom? Edward Raynes, you do, surely you do, don't you? If only I had the power to make her really tragic! Surely that would interest you? Rosa, Betty, can't you touch her, can't you give life to her spirit? I hoped Rosa would strike the spark, you know."

"Have a row?" Rosa leaned happily back.

"Not me. I'm not one for rows, am I, Tom? Except at home, of course. You can't get along without them there, once in a way."

"You know," Welsh went on with increasing animation, "I'd been hoping for a manifestation to-night of that particular eternal antagonism, that particular eternal rivalry; you know, you understand, Tom, how Thais must have hated and derided the frailer ladies of Alexandria. It is the hatred of those who give all for those who keep back a part of the price.— I should have found that extraordinarily interesting."

"Very likely," said Edward. "But we prefer peace and our supper."

"That's just it." Fielding drained his glass. "Jack has to substitute his sensations for chicken and tongue. I wish to goodness you could eat, Jack."

"Yes," Betty put in timidly, "raw eggs aren't much, are they?"

"True," said Welsh; "true. But," he turned to Ethelle, "you have stopped crying. Go on, dear child, go on."

Ethelle looked resentfully at him. "Then I won't!" she declared, turning away. "Makin' a bloomin' show of me!" She hid her face and began to cry bitterly.

"Ah, I like you to cry!" Welsh was enthusiastic. "Let me say again that I like you to cry. Your appeal to me is amazing when you cry like that. Let me look at you, my dear child, let me look."

He seized her hands: she kept her face turned from him. "Ah, you are shy, you are shamed, you don't *wish* me to look. What delicious chagrin, what exquisite humiliation!"

"'Oo's cryin'?" said the girl impatiently in a smothered voice. "Get out. I'm goin' upstairs to wash me face." Welsh fixed his gaze on her as she left the room.

"Your cruelty is extraordinary," Edward flatteringly observed. Betty, by his side, remained demure and unastonished. Fielding and Rosa were interested in one another.

"Ha, and you sucked the sweets of that episode, my friend, I'll be bound. I saw you look!" Welsh lowered his voice. "Now you see what I mean when I say that girls like Ethelle are drained of sex, that they're not bound by the usual sex conventions. Ethelle feels antagonism, she responds to her emotion, she sets it free. The presence of men doesn't matter. No restraint, no inhibition, none of the usual female taboos. My girl would fight tooth and nail in the market place. None of the usual indirect attacks. And why not? She has nothing to lose, she has no one to keep. The fascination of that! The appeal of those who have nothing to lose!"

"She didn't like crying, all the same."

"Ah, no, I'm glad she didn't." Welsh ignored the implied criticism of his theory. "But where is Madame?" His expression changed. "Where are my eggs? Port? *Port?* My dear Tom, my

dear friend, would you wish me to take *Port*? How horribly I should suffer! Even claret is cancerous to me. No, I don't think I will take chicken. No, I reject chicken to-night. On these occasions I prefer, I really prefer, to be hungry. I worship fasting."

"By Jove," said Fielding with a chuckle, "I don't. And physiologically I'm sure you're wrong."

"What's that, Tom?" Rosa inquired. "Something naughty, I'll be bound."

"Venus takes cold without Ceres and Bacchus," Edward was explaining as Madame reappeared with the eggs in a paper bag.

Welsh leapt to his feet, snatched the bag, and began breaking the eggs into a glass. "Admirable!" he cried. "I am grateful to you forever!" He gulped an egg down, with large display of his throat, broke another immediately, gulped that, and then, in rapid succession, broke a third. Rosa and Betty watched him, fascinated. So did Madame, speechless for once. His red, moist, absorbent, palpitating gullet reminded Edward of a tinted jellyfish. Ethelle returned as the fourth egg was slipping down that distended animal cavity.

"My Lord!" she cried. "Don't do that! It turns me stummick."

Welsh gasped. He sat down, with very visible satisfaction.

"It's all right now," said Edward. "He's finished. The primeval egoist has completed his meal. Most interesting, my dear friend, most interesting.

Your individualism is remarkable." Drinking his Chambertin unawares, he made a wry face. "And now," he went on, "after this little apéritif, we can really enjoy our supper."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE Port wine made a difference to the party. Edward abandoned his Chambertin; he found that the other fluid was easier to drink, even pleasant after the first tumbler: but, conscious that he had Betty, he made the second last some time. Welsh persisted in abstaining, but he had never any need of such stimulus. Fielding showed himself a gradual, steady drinker; he was safe with his glass, on a good understanding with his liquor. Their companions reacted, of course, much more rapidly to the wine.

“Ah, ha!” Welsh had cried delightedly, after a remark from Betty, “the edges of that speech are a little blurred!” And so they were. Betty blushed and smiled; she shyly sipped her Port again. “How I wish,” Welsh continued, “that I could see you with your mother! Can’t you imagine, Edward, how her mother would arrange her, and manage her hair, and lace her little garments? Could anything be more provocative? A mother *preparing* her child! What a picture!”

Edward applauded. He stroked Betty’s hand as it lay on the table.

“Does one’s ’eart good to see young people ’appy

together, don't it?" Ethelle eyed them sentimentally, almost as if she herself had been Betty's mother. The wine had lulled her. "Oh, boys," she had observed, "I'm full of booze and benevolence," which was quite true. "And we're all 'appy together, ain't we?" she had gone on.

After supper they all, unintentionally as it were, without any discussion, went up to Welsh's bedroom. It was large, and had a blazing fire. Welsh, who could never be warm enough, had insisted on that. No one lit the gas. The fire-light threw grotesque shadows about the room; it gave every object a character of ambiguity. The large mid-Victorian four-poster bed, with its heavy canopy, projected a personal influence upon the company, an influence hinting something unlooked for and secret. The bed seemed to be in waiting, seemed to be prepared for a future that it knew. In its withdrawn vigilance and secure prescience it compelled the absurd fancy of a superiority to human beings. There was something infallible about it, an infallibility that accentuated the dubious lives of men and women. It was ambiguous for others, but certain of itself, like Fate. Edward could understand the worship of idols.

No one could evade the consciousness of the bed, but the instinct to disregard it, to behave as though it were not there, was irresistible. The room, for all of them, so far as conduct went, ended where the bed began. The region of the bed took up its place in the backs of their minds, well marked off from ma-

terial recognition. No one admitted the change of mood: they talked and laughed as before, but now they heard themselves talking and laughing.

Fielding and Rosa had led the drifting procession upstairs, and Fielding at once sat down near the fire. He placed his glass on the coal scuttle, then slowly took a cigarette from a cardboard box. Rosa went with a fling to the dressing-table, and began to give little touches to her hair. Edward, with his hand under Betty's arm, followed, and after them came Welsh and Ethelle. Betty fluttered from Edward, Ethelle also took to hovering about the room, while Edward and Welsh stood by the mantelpiece, watching the three girls and their shadows, flitting and wavering here and there. Betty kept fingering and examining various little objects on the dressing-table and the chest of drawers, with exclamation and query: "Well, what's this old thing for, I wonder?" "Look at gran'pa's shaving paper!" "Here's Aunt Maria's box of pins!" She laughed, and so did the other two. Ethelle produced her powder-puff and her lip-salve, she gave little dabs to her cheeks and mouth. Rosa endeavoured for a satisfying view of her full length in the mirror; she advanced, withdrew, posed, made a noise with her tongue against her teeth, exclaimed that it was a funny kind of a light. Then they all three laughed again. The men did not speak to them; they were giving them time to settle, treating them as if they were birds about to be fed. Welsh curled himself

up on the floor, almost in the fender, in a position that looked extremely uncomfortable. Edward stood, wondering when and where Betty would sit down.

"As for this problem of Poverty," Fielding was saying, "for every one who died of starvation I'd hang a millionaire. And when the millionaires were finished I'd start on the bishops. You wouldn't hear so much about Poverty then."

"That's right!" declared Welsh. "To the guillotine with the aristocrats! Splendid!"

"Splendid!" Edward echoed listlessly, his eyes still on Betty.

"The trouble with the Labour Party," Fielding went on, "is simply that they haven't a man amongst them. A set of eunuchs. One silly fad after another. Teetotalism, Peace-at-any-price, Feminism."

Edward was looking carefully at Betty, who had just sat down on a high chest, a kind of sea-chest, opposite him. Her legs did not reach the floor. Rosa took a chair near Fielding, and began to appear to listen to what he was saying. Ethelle moved a dilapidated stool towards Welsh. She sat on it, stroked his hair and whispered him. But they none of them gave the impression of being settled: they had perched, that was all.

Welsh took Ethelle's hand. "Of course, Tom," he remarked abstractedly, "we know your irreconcilable hatred of Socialism."

"Not at all. I wish them success, far more suc-

cess than they've had. Individualism needs a strong opposition. These Socialists haven't any guts, worse luck. Why, Shaw himself is only a Nonconformist parson, a sort of R. J. Campbell moral idealist, when you get far enough down in him, and he's the pick of the lot. But the Sidney Webbs, and Ramsay Macdonald! Not a single idea with any sap in it. It makes me thirsty to think of them."

"The Socialists," Edward put in, "have achieved the least engaging qualities of spinsterhood. Unconscious imitation of their pets, the Suffragettes."

"That's the clearest symptom of our degeneracy, this Feminist movement. When men become effeminate, women want the vote."

"Suffragettes!" exclaimed Ethelle. "I 'eard one of 'em spoutin' away up at Shiel Park the other day, an' I shouted at 'er to 'old 'er bloomin' jaw. Silly owl!"

"All she wanted was a boy," remarked Fielding.

"Ah, Tom!" Welsh reproached him. "These formulæ of yours for the female sex!"

"Wanted a boy! She got one, quick enough." Ethelle's Port had relaxed her. "Young feller, nice big young feller, what had been takin' 'is bit. 'E come up to 'er, an' 'e says: 'Now then, you git down. You ain't got no modesty,' 'e says, 'goin' on that way in public, 'ussy!'— Jus' what I think.— An' 'e takes 'er round the waist, an' they all laughed. A little bony scrap she was, an' not thinkin' of nothin' but yellin' votes. You bet your life I wouldn' lose a

chance like that with a fine big feller like 'im. So I squeeze meself up to them, and I says: 'You great big fat beggar,' I says, 'you let that lady alone!' An' 'e says,—of course 'e was a bit boozy—'e says: 'I ain't pertickler, an' I will say you look a nice little piece o' goods fer a feller to 'andle.' Jus' like that 'e says: 'You do look a nice piece o' goods fer a feller to 'andle.' Oh, 'e was a bit boozy. We 'ad a gran' time together, an' for some time I met 'im reg'lar. An' that woman 'owlin' for votes. What's the good of a bloomin' vote? Dear 'eart! "

She sat down by Welsh on the hearthrug. They were silent. The fire was dying down. The shadows flickered more and more spasmodically, the bed seemed to float like a thing of a dusky dream, in an alien distance, less and less discoverable. Edward began to realise that they were there almost in the dark. The tobacco smoke was thickening, it hung poised in the air,—bluish clouds. Betty, at her timed moment, left the chest and sat down on a small ragged sofa in the middle of the room, at the foot of the four-poster. Edward went to her. They were out of the direct view of the others there; they took many caresses. He put both his hands behind her head and pressed her face to his: he kissed her relaxed mouth and her warm neck. She was basking like a cat, perfectly placid. She was sating herself, he felt; her appetite was obvious,

animal. Did he like that? He looked at Rosa. Fielding's arm was round her; she too gave the impression of feline purring satisfaction. No, he didn't like it; it was too cushiony. Edward began to feel as if he were in a fauteuil of yielding plush, before an empty stage. It was no good, he reflected, getting one thing by itself. "Children of nature!" Yes, but Nature gave you more than this, if you played properly up to her. What Edward wanted was the physical and something more,—something fused, something transforming, something that would throw physical sensation into fresh moulds. He kissed Betty again. No, it would not do; he had exhausted that.—How curious that Betty's parents should believe in these occasional visits of hers to a girl-friend. Parents were extraordinary, parents were always fools, quite unintelligent about their own children. He knew more about Betty than her father did, he was sure . . . more than her mother? Well, no, perhaps her mother knew a good deal, and *kept account*. That would be very maternal. He looked at Welsh, Welsh sitting there on the hearth-rug, with one leg ludicrously outstretched, with one hand tentatively stroking Ethelle's neck, as he might have stroked a strange cat whom he wished to keep in humour but of whom he was not quite sure. Welsh's mood had evidently changed. He looked as though he were striving very conscientiously towards his part, as though he were keeping carefully in mind

Casanova and the Marquis de Sade. "Come, help me, spirits of my wicked mood!" But after awhile he withdrew his wicked hand in despair.

"I must introduce you," he said to Ethelle, by way of making amends; "I must introduce you to my brother Lulu. You would like him; he is young, he is handsome. He knows how to treat girls. I can't, you know, but —"

"Dear 'eart! When I don't want nobody but you." But her tone was unconvincing. "Oh, 'ow I wish you'd say some of your beautiful poetry!"

Welsh closed his eyes, drew in his underlip, and pressed his teeth upon it. He seized the girl by the shoulders, opened his eyes and fixed them upon her. "'Now,'" he whispered hoarsely, "'now — o'er the one half world, Nature lies dead, and wicked dreams abuse The curtain'd sleep.'" He shuddered, and Ethelle began to enjoy her thrills. "'Witchcraft celebrates —'" he went on with the passage. Edward thought he had never heard it more effectively done. Welsh had shown an artist's sense in choosing it for that particular moment in that particular place. Instinctively Edward released Betty's hand. . . . "'And withered murder . . .'" Ethelle gasped, trembled, gave a little cry. "' . . . whose howl's his watch. . . .'" When Welsh had finished, the girl clutched him, pressed her face to his shoulder, wept violently, shook from head to foot.

Welsh derived much satisfaction from this display.

"You see," he exclaimed triumphantly, "how morbid her nerves are! Ah, I like that. 'Howl, howl, howl, howl! Oh, you are men of stone!'"

Ethelle dried her eyes. "I wasn't 'owlin'," she said indignantly, and sat up straight.

"Let's turn the gas on," said Rosa.

"It's wonderful, Jack," said Fielding. "*Macbeth* is the finest of the lot."

Edward glanced at Betty. She was not affected in the least. He felt angry. This absorption with sex to the exclusion of all other emotions! How dull Betty would be when she had lost her youth! But really she was dull now. Fielding was wrong about Feminism. The Feminists were out for a right end, at least, for all their stupidities. The old way of treating women had simply decivilised them, made them impossible companions.

"Ah!" cried Welsh suddenly, "when you cry, my little Sonia, I have unpardonable longings!" Ethelle was interested at once; she gazed at him romantically. "That is the provocation that I can never resist!"

"The kindest 'eart that ever was," she sobbed pathetically.

"But suppose — suppose that when we meet again, you find me changed. Changed! With all the evil wishes of years hung withered like a row of little vicious wind-dried weasels — on the park-palings of my noble mind! We grow old and good, my Sonia, old and good. — But when your mouth

trembles like that — oh, the infernal provocation of just that kind of tremor! No, no, I won't think of these things! I must not think of them!" He closed his eyes, and his jaw familiarly dropped.

Edward's spleen was stirred. What a sensation-alist, he thought, what a gross glutton! The man's greed of his sensations, the laboured and inept way in which he got hold of them and mauled them and messed them about! No doubt by his imagination he could make any material serve; he kept free from disillusion and discontents that vexed Edward, but the price he paid was too heavy. Yes, Welsh was really corrupt, though Reggie Tryers could never have analysed his corruption.

"And," Welsh continued, with a sinister premonitory emphasis, fixedly regarding the girl, "I will not allow you to have wicked thoughts either! We must dream together of large mild moons, oh, so mild and large! Come, take more wine, that you may *sleep* better.— Sleep and sleep on, my child. I am not my brother Lulu."

Fielding was talking to Edward, explaining the superiority of girls who were not particularly pretty over girls who were. Pretty girls, he said, were not only spoilt and difficult and uncertain, but they were given to occupation with side-issues. They diffused their energies in harmless flirtations, whereas the others, chosen by few, surrendered themselves with concentrated energy when the time came. Those innumerable *arrières-pensées* of the pretty girl were,

so Fielding found, extremely irritating and wasteful of one's time. Edward acknowledged the justice of these remarks, and was amused by the complete disregard of them shown by Betty and Rosa, who evidently supposed this to be one of those abstract discussions that men were in the habit of taking with their tobacco, and with which they themselves had nothing to do. . . . How bound in all women were by the triple brass of their particular codes, how they behaved always according to rule, whether they were adulteresses or whether they were not! — Betty chattered according to code, played her game of sex according to code, fitted herself in, just like any of the rest. If only he could find an independent spirit somewhere, in some girl's body! Eunice — surely in some one or two or three of those looks of Eunice — surely there might be something there, something of what he wanted.

The time went on. Welsh talked a great deal, he enjoyed himself, he made a telling impression on Ethelle, whom he attracted and repelled, frightened and charmed, after his will. "Daughter of Babylon! Wasted with desire, in whom desire is wasted!" Welsh apostrophised her in this kind of way, and she responded well to all his dramatic hits, trembling, averting her face, raising her hands, giving little cries. Edward was reminded of Eunice. "A similar type," he thought.

Fielding observed the spectacle from time to time with fluctuating interest. "Well," he said at last to

Rosa, "it's about time you and Betty went to bed, eh? Let's show them to their room." He turned to Edward.

"Good night! Good night!" Welsh cried to them as they prepared to go. "Drink more wine, Sonia, more wine! We are left alone, and you must sleep. Drink that you may sleep! 'Good night, good sleep, good rest from sorrow, to her that shall not know good morrow!'" He made another of his alarming grimaces.

"Oh, Jack!" the girl wailed, "you will be good to me, won't you?"

She seemed on the point of complete collapse, her face twitched, she closed her eyes, and Edward noted the throbbing of her darkened eyeballs. Yes, Welsh had fairly worked her up; he had drawn off, well enough, those outer skins of her susceptibilities. Well, it was a night she could remember. "You will be good to me?" Was that pathetic, or sentimental? Partly the one, no doubt, partly the other. That was the cursed way with everything: everything was partly something and partly something else. Eunice and Ethelle . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

WHEN they reached the girls' bedroom Fielding suggested that Rosa should come and have a look at his, to see that he was comfortable. Edward, left alone with Betty, played up to this pretence of propriety.

"Well," he said, "they seem to be staying a long time, don't they? We can't very well disturb them, though, I suppose, what?"

"But we *ought* to, don't you think?"

"Oh, but we can't. It wouldn't do; we don't know them well enough."

A conversation to precisely the same effect was no doubt going on at the same time in the other room. It was a device, quite in accordance with code, to save their faces, more or less, when they met at breakfast next morning.

"What do you think?" Betty put her hand on Edward's knee. "That Madam Weiss, she's a proper tricky one. What do you think she said to me the other day?"

"Well?" Edward listened idly.

"Well, she asked me, last time I was here with you, you know, to look in and have a cup of tea some Wednesday when I had a half day. So I came round once or twice; very nice, she was, gave me a

little brooch and a hand-bag. I was here to see her last Wednesday, but I'm not having tea with her again, no, thank you!" She tossed her head and waited for Edward to speak. His thoughts had wandered, he said nothing, but kissed her absently, realising that something was expected of him. "She got up to her games with me! Nasty-minded old toad, that's what she is! Wanted to know if I wouldn't like to meet a nice gentleman-friend of hers, a proper generous gentleman what'd give me lots of presents if I was kind to him — *kind* to him, the old toad! And not *very* old, either, she said. Impudence!"

"My dear Betty! How perfectly scandalous! I'll give it to Madam Weiss for this, you'll see. She shall hear about it. Confound the woman! What the devil does she mean?"

Edward was indignant, and amused the next moment by his indignation. After all, if Madame had found him a girl like Betty in that kind of way,—well, he would probably have rejected the offer, because he preferred to find girls for himself; he didn't like them passed on: but it would never have occurred to him to be indignant. He might have reflected that in twenty years' time there would be something to be said for such mediation. But Betty was his girl, so he revolted from the spectacle of senile lust dependent on the procuress. Yet no doubt that was the spectacle which he himself was destined to present, in that interesting future period

when girls like Betty would no longer have anything to do with him, when he would have to fall back on the usual ministers to flaccid appetites. Thirty-five already! Edward was filled with dominating envy of Betty's youth. Eighteen was she now, or nineteen? Anyhow in ten years' time she would still be under thirty, in ten years she would be of an age that he envied now. What a monstrous inequality! Edward smiled at his irrational egoism, but his envious ruminations could not be checked. He thought of the possibilities of youth; one after another they occurred to his suffering mind. He no longer heard what Betty was saying; it was with an effort that he brought himself to her. Long after she had gone to sleep, he was wakeful. Certain details had repelled him extremely. Why had he contracted this morbid æsthetic infection?

Edward thought of Tryers, of how Tryers professed himself tormented by his desires. No doubt Tryers was sincere to a certain extent, no doubt he was driven to religion for self-preservation, just as Edward himself might be driven to marriage. Then there was George. George got out of it by perpetual useless activities. It was absurd. Was there no way of leading a happy equable life? Must one either be converted or tread the mill? The fact was, to live happily one had either to be commonplace or a genius, and generally one didn't live happily even then. Of course he had managed his own life fairly well, he had kept clear of vexations, he had enjoyed

himself, he had been, so he thought, on the winning side, but he was beaten now. He was suffering the fate, a little belated, perhaps, of the mid-way man. A mid-way man, disturbingly near middle age! A man whose mania for thinking himself happy was breaking down. Yet he had been happy, he supposed; he had been gay, nonchalant, and enviable, determined to be so forever. The flaw lay, no doubt, in that very determination.

Now, all interests were fading. . . . Edward was quite certain that he had no genius, and that his youth was over: certain, too, that the usual consolations of mediocrity and middle age could not serve him, that he could never be a clubman or a golfer, or keep a small yacht, or go in for politics or the Turf. All this would not matter (his thoughts described their circle) if only he could live as he had lived before. Five or six years ago he was all right, with his money and his leisure and his amusements and his temperament, and since then he had been assailed by doubts and discontents only occasionally, hardly realising the change at first,—but the change had worked its way. He had to realise it now: the last few days had made the revelation quite clear. Some kind of a reconstruction was necessary, though he had always laughed at reconstructions, and said that they made no difference.

No matter . . . he would strike out somehow, he would not submit to humiliation. Impossible to be

humiliated, if only one took things lightly enough. That was what he would do. He would take the gravest possible steps in the lightest possible spirit. . . . At last he soothed himself to sleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII

EUNICE played tennis well, and Edward, being out of practice, was only just her match. They hardly talked at all, except of the game. When she was actually playing, Edward noticed, her body's gestures were normal, but she did not stoop naturally in picking up an occasional ball, and when walking about the court she certainly posed. As soon as her energies were released from the game, she became once more the Divinity of Raoul Root's circle. However, she stood daylight well. She was rather paler than Edward had thought, but her skin was clear, healthy. How old was she? Twenty-five? Twenty-seven? Perhaps only twenty-four? He was not sorry to reflect that she was certainly older than Betty.

He looked at her, at first, a great deal: he was always looking at her, he lost four games running. The simple grey skirt and white blouse made a stronger appeal to his senses than her studied attire of three nights before. She was too much got up for a goddess, then: and besides, Edward was always attracted by simple clothes, he liked a girl to be dressed so that she could strip as easily and as quickly as a boy. Eunice, as she was then, could have stripped in

a moment. Edward missed an easy stroke, and vowed he would begin to play tennis.

With great difficulty but increasing self-command he won three games, each after a deuce score and several 'vantages; but Eunice won the fourth, in spite of his efforts. She was flushed now, most becomingly, but Edward would not look at her. The score was 5-3 against him. They played for nearly an hour longer, deuce and 'vantage, and at last he won.

"Will you come to tea with me?" she said, panting from her exertion. "I live with my cousins — in Earl's Court."

"That depends —" Edward began.

"On what?" She turned to him, still breathing quickly. He felt her breath.

"Will you marry me?" He should not have spoken excitedly, but he couldn't help it.

She did not quiver or droop, she was particularly erect, and her regard was one of genuine amazement.

"But I'm not in the least — prepared . . ."

Edward's gaze was upon her. Suddenly she turned from him with an affrighted gesture; her whole body became tremulous, on purpose. The Divinity had had time to recover herself.

Edward knew quite well what he was expected to say. "You timid wild-wood thing! Why did I catch at your wings so roughly?" — something of that kind. But he was silent.

Eunice continued to tremble. "You frighten

me," she said at last. Her face was still turned from him.

"Tell me," Edward insisted, "will you marry me or not?"

"Oh — no — no,— How could I . . .?"

"Well, let's walk together and talk it over." Edward was able now to disguise his excitement.

Eunice went with him, "moving as one in a dream." No doubt this too was taught in "Learn from the Swan." How much he would have to change her! All the better, all the more interesting, so much the more zest.

"You are not going to marry Raoul Root, or Massington, are you?"

"Oh, no — no." Her tones shimmered as though speech might have broken them, they were so fragile.

"Then you are very wise. Life with them would be the life you know, the life you are tired of. You are tired of it, aren't you?"

"Tired?" For the first time since her amazement she looked at him, and her eyes were wide. They were wet, too, actually wet. ("Yes," thought Edward, "upon my word, they are positively starry! What an actress! They were meant to be starry, and starry they are. Amazing!") "I think," she went on, "that I was born to be ti — to be weary," she corrected herself. But she had hardly avoided the slip. "Born to be tired" suggested "born

tired," which suggested Weary Willies and the comic papers.

"And you're not going to marry any one in Root's circle?"

Her lips shaped "no": very slightly and subtly she moved her head.

"Then — or rather in any case — I ask you to marry me. I offer you a different life, it's this different life that you need. Don't you feel, haven't you often felt, that in your present life you are thwarted, dragged down? That you are marred by clashing influences? I feel this, I know it. Tell me that it is true. . . ."

"Your eyes are clear. You have vision." She hesitated, looking shy, very caught and shy. "You have vision,— my lover. Yes, it is true."

"Are you not as a reed in the stream, a reed dragged down by other reeds that twine and encircle — too much?" Edward could not resist this figure. It was impossible not to say things that would "go down." He understood Welsh's lapses on the platform.

"You know," Eunice rejoined languorously, after a pause. "You know. I see."

"I know always. Will you believe that I know always?" He was passionate and masterful; the right touch, he felt sure.

"I believe." She looked at him again. It was the "gaze as of one hypnotised by power unseen."

"Then," Edward replied brightly, "you have accepted me. It is all quite settled."

She stopped and looked on the ground. An elderly gentleman, in a hurry at their heels, nearly charged her from behind, but luckily held himself up just in time. Edward caught his breath. The intrusion of open burlesque at that moment might have spoilt everything.

"Have I?" The girl looked pale. Could she really be pale? "How can I—dare this thing? . . . Oh, do you think—my lover—that this is a beautiful thing for us to do?"

"Yes," said Edward simply, "very beautiful. But we must be married at once, we must—" he was going to say "get a special licence," but he substituted: "make all speed to the place of the covenant."

He felt suddenly that he wanted tea. Gently he guided Eunice to the nearest tea-shop. He found a secluded table. She was trembling, of course.

"What will you do-oo with me? What will you do-oo?"

It was the note of the wood-dove. For a sharp awful moment, Edward felt that he didn't like it. He pulled himself together. Anyhow, he would get what he could out of this: and, after all, didn't this excess of pose in her prove that she was malleable, inordinately responsive to environment? That was what he wanted. It would be his turn next, not Raoul Root's. What satisfaction to be able to

say, in a year's time, "We have changed all that"!

"Shall I tell you what I would do? . . . I would take you, as the player takes his lovely lute, I would wake from you all manner of strange sounds undreamed of; the sounds that are heard in the depths of strange seas,—or in sacred rivers."

"Ah!" She rewarded him with a sigh long-drawn. He read an "encore" in her misted eyes, but he could not for the life of him keep this kind of thing up. His constructions, he knew, would get hopelessly mixed soon. No matter!

"Daughter of the reeds and the waters," he proceeded, "you shall learn from my embraces. I will bring you into the sun, and in the sun you shall grow. The trees that lean their branches to the stream, they have been your lovers till this hour, they have covered you, I beg pardon, they have protected for you the face of the waters,—those cool clear waters where you made your home. But now — now — I come to take you. I break the shadow of your trees, I take you in my arms, I crush, I bruise, I burn, I bless. . . . I will show you all the secret ways of love. . . ."

A waiter, with whiskers and a Victorian countenance, appeared with the tea. "China, I think you said, miss?"

"Yes, yes," said Edward impatiently, "and bring some hot water." The waiter withdrew.

"You will not,"—Eunice clasped her hands, and extended her long arms, under cover of the table —

"you will not be untender with me, my lover?"

"My name is Edward. I should have told you that before. . . . If I wound, I wound to heal." He assumed an enigmatic air. She, too, looked enigmatic without loss of time. They were enigmatic together.

A posthumous child of Oscar and Rossetti, Edward reflected as he gazed; left, so it had happened, on Raoul Root's doorstep. She really belonged to the 'eighties . . . no, she belonged to any and every period. These art-circle women were always the same, just as little light o' loves were always the same: they reacted in the same way from the influence of quite different men. Their parasitism did not vary its expression. So, when he took her, there might be no surprises. . . . An idea struck him.

"You are of the air," he announced, "of the fire. Yes, you are air and fire." He paused: surely that was an expression of Shakespeare's? Yes, of course; so much the better. "The grosser elements — er —" (if only he could remember!) "have no part in you. Air, fire, and water,— but nothing of earth. Can I sully so delicate a spirit by common bonds, can I enfeeble it by the parchment of the law, soil it by —" (What was that passage in Richard II? He couldn't remember.) "Should not our union rather be free?" He looked at her; she gave him no encouragement. "Free as — as air, in fact," he added lamely, then with an effort concluded, "free as the air that is your element."

An awkward silence followed. Eunice was startled, uncomfortable, on her guard.

"Oh, no," she said. "I have a mother in America."

"Oh, indeed. Of course, that —"

"And besides," the girl went on hurriedly, with no tremor in her voice now, "besides, I don't think, — no, really in any case I could not —"

"That's all right." Edward waved his hand generously. "I shan't refer to the subject again."

He felt a little chilled, all the same, a little subdued. Eunice sipped her tea.

"Your name," she broke the silence, "I have pleasure in your name. It is so *clear*, so simple, so strong. Do not be too strong, Edward, do not make me afraid,—too much."

She had reverted to her former tone. Edward was disappointed: she was too much on one note. He must cure her of that.

"You shall be born again," he replied. "And don't you forget it!" he added under his breath. "In birth," he went on by a happy inspiration, "there must always be fear."

"The birth of a star," she murmured.

Edward felt it was time to pay the bill. He could not keep this up. This period of being engaged, he began to foresee, was likely to be trying. He had always disliked the idea of being engaged. An undignified equivocal position at the best. He must get it over quickly. That special licence . . .

Meanwhile she would be busy, he hoped, with the usual arrangements. Once they were married positions would be defined, the way would be clear.

"You will begin to-morrow," he told her, "to clothe yourself for me in your marriage raiment. The era of preparation — no, not the era," he corrected hurriedly, "the month, rather,—the week,—a very short time, anyhow,—one might say figuratively the day or the hour.— Make your lustrations, perform your final rites. The hour is consecrated. I shall not intrude upon it. This is the silent hour before the dawn, and we must keep silence,—the silence of worship. You understand?"

"Ye-es." Her eyes had narrowed as he spoke, but she recovered herself and made them large with wonder.

"I will write to you. When I have arranged. In three weeks from now, do you think?"

Eunice reflected for a moment. "In rather over three weeks," she replied.

"Very well. Other details can wait. A Registry Office; you do not object to a Registry Office? . . . That is settled, then. Waiter, the bill."

The waiter came up, and hard at his heels was Reggie Tryers, who accosted Eunice with suppressed excitement.

"Miss Dinwiddie! How interesting to see you again! I had no idea that you knew my friend Raynes. I thought I recognised you as we came in,

but your back was turned. Won't you both join us at our table? You know the man I'm with. Hubert Reeves, of Sydney."

Eunice gave a little gasp. "Oh, Hubert Reeves." She turned to Edward. "He has a beautiful spirit."

"You must come," Tryers hurriedly urged. "I am to build him a new church, a beautiful new church. He was speaking only just now of that exquisite altar-cloth you embroidered for him a couple of years ago, when you were first in London. You must come."

Eunice rose slowly. Was it Edward's imagination, or did she really look like a figure in a stained glass window? The way she took colour! But why complain? He valued her as an actress. Still — that altar-cloth. He had had no idea that she could ever have embroidered an altar-cloth. So that was the former phase. . . . He cursed Tryers and his Hubert Reeves. Hubert! A sacerdotal name; and Reeves suggested the Sarum use. Why should they be mixed up in this? Edward followed Eunice; he followed his betrothed.

"What's that you were saying about a Registry Office?" whispered Tryers.

"Go to the devil!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE priest was a short, heavy, dark man, with a white, plump face, and loose pouches bulging under his conspicuous eyes. They were eyes that affected Edward unpleasantly, the eyes of a successful slave, he thought, of a man who knew how to be servile and dominant, to right and to left, timing his occasions. They were cold eyes, grey-blue, cold and large, very watchful, indicating a second-rate intelligence, rapidly moving, always on the alert within its little limits. An obvious affinity of Tryers. . . .

When Reeves rose, extending a slabby hand, Edward was struck by his resemblance to a toad. What could Eunice be making of this mean little obese man? Edward looked at her: she was evidently thinking of no one but herself; she was quite unconscious of the repulsiveness of Mr. Reeves. There she stood, with her drooped fingers, and her eyes eloquent of a thousand unspoken thoughts, all of them fakes, probably. Edward began to feel bitter. What fools people must be, to make a priest of Mr. Reeves! The man suggested a bun in its mould, before it has been taken out and its edges clipped; a bun badly made, a puffed, soggy, bil-

ious bun. . . . An altar-cloth,—well! Of course Reeves alluded to that at once.

“We cannot forget you in Sydney,” he said. “Your offering is with us there. My pride was great in bringing it to our dear church. So many, I know, have been helped.”

He spoke with subdued resonance: it was the tone of the professed public speaker conscious of his profession, conscious of his power of holding in reserve the force of a voice that could reach thousands. Edward disliked him more and more. His clerical manner of pronouncing the word “helped,” how odious that was! Edward could imagine him using the word again and again, in appeals for Church Work, in private little spiritual talks, in meetings for getting at young people’s souls, in sermons for special occasions, in all kinds of up-to-date ecclesiastical advertisements. How detestable these modern influential clergy were, how they had degenerated from the agreeable and harmless mid-Victorians!

Eunice stood with bowed head. “I am glad,” she replied; “I am very glad.”

Mr. Reeves waved an ingratiating hand. “Let us sit.” He lowered his voice to an intimate pitch. It was just so, Edward reflected, that he might observe “Let us pray” to penitent ladies seeking counsel in his study. Tryers regarded his friend with marked satisfaction.

As soon as they sat down Edward realised sharply that he was engaged to be married to this girl. The

presence of the others curiously emphasised the fact. Incredible that only an hour ago he should have been unpledged. Certainly it began to seem important, what he had done. . . .

"I've been telling Miss Dinwiddie of our new church," Tryers was saying. "Could you persuade her, Hubert, to make us a beautiful Whitsun stole? That's something we really need."

"I do not pretend to be able to persuade Miss Dinwiddie to anything." Mr. Reeves cocked his head, and smiled. ("Humorous relief," thought Edward, "judiciously introduced: just as necessary for a successful parson as the 'human element.'") "But," there began a telling emphasis—"but if Miss Dinwiddie *did* make up her mind to give us a stole, she might be able to persuade *me* to accept it."

Edward could have thrown back his head and howled like a dog. Eunice, it seemed, had no such temptations. She was smiling, with an appreciation that was gracious, a sufficient appreciation, though non-committal and unstressed. You could not tell, to look at her, that anything had jarred. Tryers glanced at Reeves admiringly, congratulating him, evidently, just as Reeves was evidently congratulating himself.

"I don't say, mind," the priest continued, "that you could get me to accept a cope or a chasuble. No, no. We mustn't raise your hopes unduly, my dear young lady, we mustn't raise your hopes."

The last words gurgled obesely in his throat; he

finished his sentence with that kind of comfortable chuckle that is intended to put every one at his ease. Then he turned to Edward. Clearly he was afraid that Edward was being left out of it, that some tactful interposition was needed to make Edward feel himself one of the party.

"You have seen some of this wonderful work of Miss Dinwiddie's, I expect, Mr. Raynes?"

"No, but I don't doubt that I shall."

"Oh, yes,—yes, of course I will show you," Eunice broke musically in.

Edward could see by her eyes that his tone had made her a little uneasy. She shifted her glance from one to another. Was there a hint of treachery in that shifting glance? Edward wondered, half hearing what Reeves was saying.

"Oh, you must: indeed you must. I have not seen modern work to match it. Tryers quite agrees with me. In Australia, you know, we are avid for beautiful things. We wish always to make them rather than to buy,—as they did in the Church's earlier days. Yes, yes,—'m, 'm. But so few have the gift — ah, 'm, 'm."

"I am delighted to know that Miss Dinwiddie has the gift. We are engaged to be married and I have a passion for embroidered slippers."

Tryers exclaimed, but Reeves had more self-control and less reason to be surprised. He grasped Eunice's hand, his congratulations were gravely *expressés*.

“My *dear* Miss Dinwiddie!” She averted her head, and her lips trembled. Edward found her reassuringly lovely at that moment. “My *dear child!* I wish you *all* happiness. And you, Mr. Raynes, happiness is yours in full measure. It were vain to wish you more. Allow me to congratulate you on your *won-derful* good fortune —”

Edward bowed. Glancing at Tryers, he was surprised by the spasm of malevolence and chagrin which at that moment overcame the architect’s features. But Tryers at once readjusted his expression; he followed rapidly on the priest’s cue.

“Our friend has always been lucky,” he said, ostentatiously cordial, “but, by Jove, he’s luckier than ever now! I congratulate you both, heartily.” He shook Eunice’s hand, and then Edward’s. “So this,” he added with intent, “was the meaning of the Registry Office.”

Eunice flushed and looked vexed. She tapped her foot. Mr. Reeves straightened himself.

“The Registry Office!” he exclaimed, hurt and grieved. “Are you to be married in a Registry Office?”

“Certainly,” replied Edward. “It is a very simple and easy way to be married.”

“We are just two beautiful Greek children. We wish to be simple.” Eunice leaned forward, clasping her hands.

The priest felt that he was being challenged.

"Of course," he moved warily, "I have no *locus standi* in your affairs at all, Mr. Raynes, no *locus standi* whatever —" He hesitated.

"I agree with you," said Edward.

"But as a priest," Reeves was nettled now, "and as a friend, if I may say so, of Miss Dinwiddie's, I feel that I am bound, in duty bound, to — well, I must not say to protest, but to ask you if you could not possibly reconsider your plans in this one particular."

Edward's spleen was beginning to rise. The studied moderation of this man, the "sorely tried but always tactful" pose, irritated him extremely.

"You've discharged your duty," he replied shortly. "But a Church marriage is repulsive to me."

"Indeed. May I ask why?"

"Because I don't like the way Christianity has of trying to salve everything with lies: I don't like that intent to be comforting and healing at all costs. I've suffered myself from another form of the same disease."

Tryers flushed angrily. Reeves tightened his lips, setting his self-control on an eminence for emulation. He gave a forbearing reserved glance to a distant corner of the room, a glance that "not on my own account, but on yours" deprecated Edward's bad taste. Eunice sat with twined fingers; she had adopted a look of mute and sweet distress: "If I

could, oh, how much I would!" she seemed to say; what she could not and what she would remaining, of course, in the region of enigma.

"Eunice," Edward addressed her after the painful pause; "Eunice, we spoke, I think, of going back?"

She rose with a sigh. "Good-bye," she said, hinting a world of possible concentrated meanings.

The priest bowed deeply, as he held her hand, imparting to her, perhaps, some portion of his beautiful spirit. Edward left with the briefest possible salute.

"You are not *angry* with me?" She swayed her body tentatively towards him, as they walked.

"You don't mean to say that you are really at all taken in by those humbugs? And surely you've outgrown that kind of Churchiness . . .?"

"Oh, yes . . . yes. That was some years ago. I do not worship now within walls. You must not mistake me,—Edward. But what could I do? It was so difficult for me.—What could I do?" she repeated plaintively.

"Oh, it's all right." He was pacified. "I was annoyed by the idea of your making a stole or a chasuble, or whatever it is, for that unpleasant little fat creature. You won't, of course, will you?—Well, then, it doesn't matter. Shall I get you a taxi? Oh, and, of course, I must have your address." She opened her bag and gave him a card. Her eyes were like a troubled child's. "Don't think any more of Reeves and Tryers. They are people of no importance. They aren't fit subjects for intelligent peo-

ple." He was still rather angry, in spite of himself. "Remember, I will write. In a few weeks we shall be married."

He took her hand, but his pleasure in the warm close clinging of her fingers was spoilt by remembrance of the priest's clutch a few minutes since. He would not say good-bye, with the echo of her "good-bye" to Reeves still in his ears.

He opened the door of the taxi. "You go to your cousins?" "Yes." Her eyes promised a hundred revelations that were to come. He liked that. Yes, after all he had been right, she had much to give. He read the address on the card to the driver, drew back on the pavement, raised his hat. She was bending forward, half crouched like some figure on a Greek frieze, her profile showing three quarters through the open window. Edward's last memory was of a look of withdrawn expectation of unimaginable things. His first thought when she had gone was "And I haven't even kissed her!" Well, it was better, no doubt, to hold everything in reserve. He went to his Club, played bridge till eight o'clock, dined, then took five men over to his rooms in Jermyn Street, and played poker with them till two in the morning.

CHAPTER XXX

SOME eight hours later Edward was waked from deep sleep by the entrance of Welsh. This disturbance was unexpected: on their return from Liverpool the lecturer had talked of going home.

"But I didn't," he explained now. "I went to see O'Flaherty. He persuaded me to stay. And, my friend, I come this morning to make you a communication of grave importance. I come to warn you,—to warn you. I have seen Reggie Tryers."

"Oh, so you know that I really am going to marry Eunice."

"What? What! Marriage,—actually marriage! How exciting! He never said so,—the scoundrel! I tell you, Edward, he is an incredible scoundrel! Streaks and streaks of yellow and chemical green! He is your enemy; implacable, unscrupulous, resolute. He will never, never forgive you. What inalienable jealousy, what profound hate! I recognised that look of his as soon as I saw him last night. Ah, of course he could not bring himself to tell us that you had actually won her! How extraordinarily exciting that you are to marry Eunice Dinwiddie! And when? Tell me when, my friend, tell me when! This is news indeed!"

"As soon as possible. In three or four weeks. I am going to make inquiries to-day. What is the right thing to do, do you know?"

"Oh, you get a licence. Then you have banns put up. But that isn't necessary, I believe. You state your place of residence, or something of that sort. I really forget. . . . I'm not good at these municipal affairs."

"No matter. I know a man who is a lawyer. I shall look him up this morning. Now tell me about Tryers. I met him yesterday just after Eunice had accepted me. He knows perfectly well that it is a question of marriage."

"Ah.— He came round to O'Flaherty's last night, and he talked about you all the time. He seems to be obsessed by you. He referred to Eunice as your victim. 'Poor girl,' he said, 'poor girl! I mean to save her if I can. He'll be tired of her within the year.' He harped on her innocence, her virtue, he called her a Madonna again, he contrasted her beautiful spiritual qualities with your unscrupulousness and immorality. He represented you as a monster of vice, a devourer of virgins."

"And what is he going to do about it?"

"Well, he didn't give his scheme away, but I am perfectly certain that he and Hubert Reeves are going to interview your girl. They will employ all their arts, they will talk about what is beautiful and clear, they will tell her that you are not beautiful

and clear. Remember, Reggie knows all about our visit to Liverpool. He will no doubt make the most of that. He will tell her that she's an unspotted mermaid and you an inky cuttlefish."

"Will that have much effect, do you think?" Edward got out of bed and put on his delightful dressing-gown.

"Well,—can you explain Liverpool? Can you make Eunice envisage Liverpool in a philosophic way? That is a great point. No doubt it can be done. The important thing is to know just how to make the attack. How *would* one make the attack, do you think? — My own wife quails at the very name of Liverpool."

"Just wait while I have my bath, will you? There are the cigarettes."

When Edward came back, he found Welsh walking about the room, impatient of the interval of suppression. "I've been wondering — you see, the fact is —"

"Well, come now, advise me." Edward began to put on his clothes.

"I've been wrestling with my conscience. My responsibility is beginning to weigh upon me."

"I'm afraid it is. Whenever people begin to be moral and serious they always use hackneyed phrases. They wrestle with conscience. Responsibilities weigh. Do you talk like that when you lecture on 'Hamlet'? Responsibilities! Conscience! I can't allow you to talk so disagreeably."

“What an exquisite silk vest! Salmon-pink! Now if our dear little Eunice could only see you now, — with your decadent late-Roman body! What lassitude, what lines, what morbid delicacy! I tell you what, my friend, you are like an El Greco, like the young Christ of El Greco. . . .”

“Very nice. We must go to Toledo together some time. But how am I to meet this insidious attack of Reggie Tryers? Tell me how.”

“Upon my soul! I’m inclined to advise you to do nothing at all. Let his poison work, if it can. And — I confess it — I rather hope it will. The fact is, I didn’t count the cost when I let you in for this. I can’t stand the idea of having let you in. Remorse, remorse is upon me. What was I doing bringing you two together? Marriage is an appalling business, Edward, appalling. I know, every one who is married knows, but they won’t tell. All married men are conspirators. The best of them simply keep silence, like that shrewd old fellow — who was he? — who said, ‘I could say a great deal about marriage, but I am married.’ The worst of them egg others on to marriage out of spite. That’s my worst vice, this yielding to the temptation of egging others on. If I were a Catholic, that is the only sin I should be really ashamed to confess. It is unpardonable, this mania for drawing others into one’s own net just to see how they look when they’re there! And I’m always doing it. I lead my friends on to marriage,— even my brothers. Then I have a sud-

den panic, a mad reaction, when it's too late. Well, at least I suffer. You will curse me in a year's time if you go through with this, I am sure of it! But Reggie Tryers may save us yet; let him have his way!"

"I'll be damned if I do." Edward arranged his tie with dexterous fingers. "I'm not expecting marriage to be easy or pleasant, I'm expecting it to be in many ways extremely uncomfortable. What I'm out for is experience and a thorough change. I'm tired of being a bachelor."

"Yes,— yes." Welsh's eyes shone.

"If I get tired of being married, it will be different. That's the whole point. My old lease of life is running out: I want a new one. Then there is the physical reason, with which you can't sympathise. Sporadic amours don't satisfy me any longer."

"Ah, but — of course I'm not an authority, but is Eunice the right girl to choose for physical reasons? I doubt it. A direct sensual appeal will be too 'gross' for her particular pose. She won't satisfy you with her studied vagueness, her deliberate worked-up sensitiveness; her ideals of 'ethereal passion' will suffer the rudest shocks, because — and I firmly believe this — she really has grown into what at first she pretended to be. That's why Liverpool will be so hard to explain to her. She will have an artificial revolt from Liverpool, because her pose, now in the grain, demands it. Yes, she will do what

her pose expects of her. Now the kind of girl you want is a child of nature —”

“Oh, Lord!”

“And I believe I have the very thing for you! Upon my soul! A young girl, too, younger than Eunice, not more than twenty, I’m sure,— the simplest, most innocent, most untouched creature! A Perdita, if ever there was one! She lives near my own village, alone with an antiquarian father, who has a passion for keeping bees. He writes books, all about bees. He’s almost as innocent as she is. They know nobody, positively nobody; they never go anywhere. I walk over and talk to the father, now and again. Oh, wonderfully simple-minded!”

“Do you also talk to the daughter?”

“Not an equivocal syllable. Not one word that she might not hear from her father. No, I can be amazingly virtuous. Now, there is a girl worth initiating, and she would have passion. It is there far away, remote in the depths of her dark eyes. Ah, yes, when once she is stirred! But she’s untouched now, oh, how untouched! And, my dear, you’re not really in love with Eunice, are you? Think of the layers upon layers of pretence you would have to pierce!”

“No man of pleasure over thirty can be sure that he is really in love. The perished hours are put down in the bill. And of course I know that with Eunice I shall have to destroy first. But that appeals to me. I need that kind of stimulus, just the stimu-

lus that I shouldn't get with your beekeeper's daughter. Also, I disagree with you about the persistency of Eunice's pose. I look forward to dealing with her pose, very much. Don't you see that it's her sex, it's the physical stress of her nature, that has driven her into the pose, and that when her passion is normally diverted, she will rebound? That's what I wait for, that's what I consider interesting. You don't mean to say that you think her cold, simply because she talks about sea-weed and says she's a sister of the winds and the waters?"

"No. But all the same she wouldn't like to be conquered in your way, she would shrink, I am convinced, from direct gratifications. She would like everything to be occult, unconfessed, undefined. Your sunburnt flesh would know no peace. . . . No, she would like to be corrupted by a Jesuit, that is what she would like! Zeus and Apollo are not in her line at all."

"You're very discouraging. No matter.— My own belief is that Eunice is *au fond* free from all morbid abnormalities, free both from anæsthesia and hyperæsthesia, neither undersexed nor oversexed.— Well, I release you from responsibility, and I raise the curtain for your entertainment. What more can you want?"

"Ah. Perhaps you are right. At any rate it would annoy me extraordinarily for Reggie to win. Suppose Reggie actually succeeded in taking her from you, in getting her for himself, in fact!"

"That would annoy me even more extraordinarily than it would you. You don't really think he wants to get her, do you?"

"I think that if he could only stop you marrying her by marrying her himself, he would. Yes, he certainly would. She has money, you know, and Reggie badly wants money. He's always hard up. And Eunice is the only woman of whom I've ever heard him speak approvingly. He says that she is free from the usual grossness of her sex, and all that kind of thing. Always that 'Madonna' touch. No doubt he could pretend to himself that he was still almost a celibate if he married her. She would like that. Yes, he would play the Jesuit to suit her. You never would. You couldn't, of course, tolerate the idea. Upon my soul, I don't know what to wish. These dilemmas! On the one hand the chagrin of Reggie's victory, on the other disappointment and disaster for you. I should like the girl to die suddenly. That's the only way out."

"I'm going to have breakfast. Come along." They went into the next room, and Edward rang the bell. "After breakfast," he continued, "I am going to see Eunice."

"For the present," asked Welsh, "what is your method? You move, I suppose, with infinite caution. You reveal nothing. How I should love to see and listen to you two together!"

"Oh, I play up to her, of course: very much."

CHAPTER XXXI

“**A**H!” Eunice caught her breath. “You have come. But I knew — I knew that you would.” She trembled towards Edward, and for the first time he kissed her.

Her response amazed him: she had fire, a fire that shrivelled her pose in a moment. Yes, he could swear that all herself clung to him in her lips. So much for Jack Welsh! Edward remained amazed: it was he who was breathless now; but yet not altogether — he could not tell why — not altogether reassured. Some doubt or other lay in ambush, some ambiguous presentiment showed vague outlines. It was unaccountable,— he felt impatience, impatience with himself only, he hoped it must be, not surely with — he broke off his thoughts and kissed her again. She put him gently from her, she stood looking at him with eyes that certainly were illumined. Suddenly he was conscious of two thoughts, put clearly into words, printed, so it seemed, by his brain, in very black type, on a sheet of very white paper, thrust out full in view: “I must not lose her.” “Can we be free together?” Yes, that was it, he understood himself now. Primary instinct, race-instinct commanded him in that “I must not lose

her," but secondary instinct, the instinct that inhibits the reduction of everything to the level of race, and counsels regard for individual issues, it was that secondary or acquired instinct that made him ask if he could be free with her and she with him. But could she ever be free? He was to learn that.

"What are you thinking?" She leaned her head — that sibyllic contour — towards him.

"What I think," Edward replied, "part of what I think — is: 'Are you a slave? Shall I be a slave with you, if we are together?'" He looked at her, and could see that she was chiefly occupied with the effort of not appearing to be baffled. Did she want to understand, or was she taken up only with appearances? He would not judge hastily. He would go on trying to tell the truth and then see what happened. "I shall speak to the point, because the point is so very important for us. But the worst of it is that it is almost impossible to speak clearly of what is important. Let me try and tell you, though, why I sought you out. It was because I wanted liberty." Her lips moved, she raised her head. "Sex, for me, has become an enslavement, an absorption. I have never been able to deal with it, I have sometimes been secretly dissatisfied by my failure, though I never admitted it. Sex has been the one thing that spoilt the harmony of my existence. To satisfy my desires I took girls who were the victims of the same enslavement as myself, the same absorption!" Eunice betrayed curiosity. "Only

they lived in prison, they were born there,—of course never to get out. I managed to take a ticket-of-leave now and again; but it was always, you understand, a ticket-of-leave. . . . I want you to see that it was not only a question of my not admitting that I was under this kind of bondage, I didn't for a long while realise that I was. Animal spirit and egoism served me well. . . . But not quite that either. . . . You understand? How am I to explain? I mean that it is possible to fool away one's soul."

She put out a deciduous hand, poised it for a moment, and then let it flutter to his, delicately as a blown leaf. "Our souls," she said slowly, "will grow together."

"Ah, but,"—he started from her—"that isn't what I want."

She gave him a troubled glance. She was not used to men saying that what she suggested was what they didn't want.

"This growing together of souls!" Edward got up from his chair. "Why,—do they ever, do you think, do that?"

He was silent, thinking: "I must make myself plainer. At this rate we shall never get on." The aspect of the room was somehow a barrier to the frankness at which he so touchingly aimed: every object seemed non-committal. The furniture was so nice and quiet and good, so well-mannered. . . . Not a curve of a chair-leg that could offend or fail.

Taste! taste! how he hated taste! Those excellent prints of Dutch and Italian masterpieces, what were they for except to proclaim taste? "You see that we appreciate Leonardo and Raphael and Memmeling," they seemed to insist. And then, that piano, that music-case, that dainty little slim-legged table with its dainty little China ornaments! How very well everything came within accepted limits.

"Do you know," Edward broke the pause, "I should like to take everything in this room and break it to pieces and make a bonfire of it. I should like to kick and dance and howl and smash! I should —"

Her laughter stopped him; he felt foolish, as though his hit had missed, although he had not meant it to be a hit. Eunice was laughing spontaneously, because she was amused,—he could see that. As before, that evening after Mrs. O'Malley's paper, she was like a schoolgirl.

"If only you still wore your hair down your back," he told her, "I would pull it. So this is how you treat the outbursts of my profoundest emotion! Do you think I meant that to be amusing or sensational?"

"I don't know what you meant." Her eyes still had their mocking gleam. "I don't know why you want to kick my things about. Tell me." She deliciously pursed her lips.

"Because they won't let me talk to you. If we were in a Pimlico lodging-house or a village inn I

could tell you what I want to tell you. In this place a lady-like hand with artistically filed fingernails is clapped over my mouth. Who made this room?"

"I don't believe you really want to tell me anything. Shut your eyes."

"Good Lord! The Universe doesn't want me to tell you anything. That is the real truth. The eternal prohibition! Of course, I should have known. Men and women are destined to lie to one another forever, so that this cursed world may go on spinning round, and round, and round! Yes, it would stop if they told the truth, it would stop dead. . . . My dear Eunice, my dearest girl,—when first I saw you,—when you were up there in the gallery at our friend Mr. Welsh's lecture, my spirit fled to yours. I knew that we were made for union,—union of mind, of spirit, of body. For years I had wandered, searching, searching,—in vain. I had wasted my life on petty counterfeit loves, on small and vain distractions. Then you came: then at last I knew myself, and I knew that without you myself could never be known.—Will that do? Tell me —" He took her by both wrists and looked her full in the face. Her eyes shifted momentarily, she betrayed a fleeting embarrassment, then met him boldly:

"No."

"Well, then, what do you think really happened? — You did stir me unusually when I saw you first, you impressed me emotionally, you piqued my intel-

lectual curiosity. The way you sat, the way you looked, the ways you might be thinking! You threw a peculiar glamour over my mind,—you still do.” She inclined, as though unconsciously; he felt her breath on his cheek. “No other woman had — has — ever moved me in at all your way. And now you have let me take you. You answer the physical desire that I have for you —” She winced, and turned her head away. “Physical desire,” he emphasised the words. “Yes, you are not cold.—Forgive me,”—he observed her distress —“but desire of that kind is important, isn’t it? We contemplate marriage.”

“Contemplate?” She betrayed uneasiness on the spur of the moment.

“Oh, well, I mean that we are considering,—that we are looking at — envisaging, as our friend Welsh would say,—yes, envisaging marriage. Not that we are undecided about our own marriage. Of course that is quite settled.”

Edward could not help speaking impatiently. It was maddening, this impossibility of getting her to see what he was driving at. Must women always, he wondered, be occupied with the particular case?

“I am thinking —” Eunice looked straight before her. “Your life has not been happy, then,—Edward?”

“Happy? Yes, I made it out to be happy, so it was. It wouldn’t seem happy to me, if I had to live it through again as I am now.”

"Ah, but you haven't got to!" Sentiment jumped up like a Jack-in-the-box.

"No, but the question is, now that I know all about my enslavement, or think I do, can I avoid it? Will you — can you — help me? That is the point. Is it only to be a change of prison? Will our marriage give frank liberation to the flesh without exacting the penalty, without at the same time depriving us of intellectual freedom, without the usual encroachment upon what really matters in our individual lives? — You see, you can't free the flesh *by itself*. . . ."

'He stopped and looked at her. No, she did not understand. She gave a perfect imitation of understanding, as she sat there, curved and poised, with her chin on one hand and her eyes earnestly gazing at him,—sympathising eyes, any one would have said, but sympathising with just nothing at all!

"The flesh," Edward went on hopelessly, and in spite of himself, "the flesh takes revenges if you do, and so does the mind. Neither will — well, will put up with it. Neither is satisfied. They must be put, you see, in harness. I made the mistake of thinking that I could pacify the flesh, by itself, now and again, and then take leave, then turn to the other things of life. A pleasant, easy, simple arrangement, it seemed. Well, it has broken down altogether. I have done with it. I recognise that I have never given sex its place, that I have never fused it, as it must be fused, into the metal of existence. . . . I

recognise that a permanent union is, for me, at any rate, the only possible solution,— a union in which sex is given its right play, a play that interests other faculties, freeing them — you understand? — by co-operation.”

“ I think that is beautiful,” she said, more slowly than ever. “ Of course I’m only a child, I love as a child,— but —”

“ I detest equally,” Edward continued, “ sex-negation and sex-absorption. If you knew the kind of revulsion I feel for those little, stunted, flesh-besotted, sex-ridden creatures!” Eunice betrayed curiosity again. “ Their one idea of ‘ a good time ’! And the way in which they settle down and wallow, and then when it’s over wait with folded hands till the next ‘ good time ’ comes round! You can understand the horror, the hostility, that a person diseased in part feels for those who are diseased in full, with the same disease as his own? Well, I have felt like that. I felt like that only three nights ago! ”

“ But,— Edward —” she flushed and turned from him, controlling her curiosity,—“ this is all over now. It is brave of you to tell me, but let us not remember. I will help you to forget. In the new life — I will be with you.”

“ Yes. There it is. Yes.— Well.” Edward rose: he had given it up. “ We understand one another, I am sure.”

He stood, looking down at her. She lowered her head, and suddenly he stooped, took her head be-

tween his hands, just as he had taken Betty's. It pleased him to do that. He kissed her; she trembled; he kissed her again and again, he put his arms round her and pressed her to him. The natural odour of her hair was about and through his senses; it seemed to come from her flesh through her hair. "Ah,— *this!*" thought Edward. "And the rot I've been talking!" Then at once he was conscious of a devastation, mental and physical. His head throbbed, his eyes burned, he was horribly uncomfortable, painfully excited. He felt very much as he had felt once in Spain, at a Bull Fight. Yes, his system was responding now in the same way.

Eunice clung to him, she seemed to be sucking him into her body, but why, he could not say, for to all seeming she was entirely virginal and discreet. So this was the first impression of the caresses of an untouched maid? Edward did not doubt that Eunice was chaste in the usual sense. "But all the more for that she'll take me," he thought in desperation. "I shall have nothing left, God help me! And to think how I've been talking to her! — You're a fool," he went on thinking; "you don't want her to blow either hot or cold? What do you want?" The worst of it was that he knew perfectly well, now, what he wanted. It was clearer to him every moment. He would make one last attempt, even though the recurrence might ring flat and dead. He moved slightly and she let him go.

"What I want," he blurted in an uncomfortable

defiance, "is that you should put sex in the same place as a man does,— as a man wants to. I can't stand the feminised sex-instinct any longer. It's perverted and diseased. The truth is no decent woman ought to have anything more to do with it, ever. No human being ought to be swamped in that disgusting way. . . ."

"Why, of course,— Edward! It's only the — the women of grosser type, who are. The women who are not *clear*."

He could see that she was thinking: "Did I, did I go too far just now?" and he began to reply directly to her thought.

"Oh, no," he said; "I don't, of course, think that you —" Her discomfort and surprise were so evident that he stopped short. "There are different ways of being swamped," he went on. "My objection to all of them is the same. I don't want sex to blur my life, to be forever thrusting irrelevancies at me, at every possible point. Most women make sex do that. Yes," he spoke angrily, "they do. It's the truth. They distract every issue with their personal appeals. Nothing is left clear and clean. No thought allowed free play. Emotional fervour — spilt all about by sex, in thick smears or thin — it has at every point to be kept wet, or they are lost. We want the emotions, of course: that part of us has to be fed, but why feed it at the expense of everything else that we value? Why must everything else go hang? Who gains by it? We

want sex play, we separate ourselves damnably if we don't have it, but surely if sex play were more direct it would be more really subtle in its directness, and more exciting. I want it, this sex play, without its irrelevant details. I don't want either to crush it out or to be crushed out by it."

"Irrelevant details?" Eunice looked wonderingly. "All this is so new and so strange. I don't understand: but I—I am trying to. You must teach me . . . I will try to learn. . . ."

"Irrelevant details. Yes. What I am afraid of is this: that sex will still, and worse than ever, come spying on my life, on my thought, on myself, that if I want to do anything, to think anything, the impertinent question will always come up: 'How does this bear upon your relations with her? What will she make of it? Will her hold weaken or strengthen? Will her appeal be less or more?' Women thrust such questions on men. They'd never come of themselves.— Don't you see the monstrous irrelevancy there? Doesn't that show what I mean by saying that I want a girl who can treat sex like a man?"

To his amazement her eyes filled with tears. She was almost sobbing. "What is it?" he caught her arm. "I didn't mean that you couldn't. I—I think—I am sure you can. Yes," he added with an effort, "that is just what you can do. You, with your wonderful epicene body, you must have, you

cannot but have, just that epicene mind. Eunice, I —”

“I thought”—she raised moist eyes and trembling lids to him—“I thought you wanted me for myself.”

“Of course: that is just it. Because, being yourself, you meet this need in me. Why, of course —” He hesitated, he felt baffled. “Why, of course,” he repeated, “I am drawn to you because you are yourself.”

They were silent. She turned from him and dried her eyes. He tried to understand how it was that he had hurt her pride or her vanity.

“We are well agreed,” he said at last. “I know that we are well agreed. We can take each other without deadening the Universe. We can give sex its play without loss of freedom. You see,”—at whatever risk of flatness or ineptitude he felt that he must try to sum the matter up —“you see what my dilemma has been, and how I shall solve it—with you. There are two wrong ways. One I have tried, the other I’m afraid of. I have thrown sops to the flesh, and then run away and tried to live,—couldn’t, because part of my life was left out, an organic part that I had tried to deal with separately, as if it could be put in a neat little compartment of its own. In that compartment it lost its value, it was a poor thing, it grew thin and weak and querulous, cut off in that way from spirit and mind. And,

as I said, it had its revenges. Spirit and mind weren't content, they were fretted and frayed, they revolted against the arrangement by which they were always out when the flesh was in. Naturally they refused to be in when the flesh was out! Simple enough! Well, now, I change all that, and as soon as I change it, a new danger appears, a danger that I never realised till I met you."

"Till you met me? What do you mean?"

"Why, that till I met you I had never met any woman who revealed to me the possibility of a sexual companionship in which spirit and intellect could take their place."

"Ah, but that is what love means, is it not?" She gave him a look of ethereal content.

"And, you see, that revelation brought another with it. Suppose spirit and intellect to be gradually ousted, suppose an invincible — an inherently invincible — sex-jealousy of them as intruders. Suppose that this recognition of them as co-operators, the recognition that I want,—that you want,—is not given, or given grudgingly, then, don't you see,—why, it is the worst catastrophe of all! What I want us to do — what we want to do — is to keep intellect, spirit and flesh all free together,—free because they are together, for they can't be free anyhow else. But it's difficult,—oh, the Lord knows how difficult it is!"

"Edward,"—very simply and spontaneously she took his hand,—“Edward, we can — we can — to-

gether." She sighed deeply, apparently from relief, perhaps from boredom. Again they were silent.

"I will go now," he said, breaking the long pause. He looked fixedly at her.

"What is it?" Eunice shrank.

"Why did you take me?"

"Because — because —" Once again she trembled; she was exquisite in her shyness, her uncertainty. "Love can never tell," she said at last, in her lowest, sweetest tone.

Edward was filled with admiration. "I must have her," he thought again. "Yes, there is no help for it." Then he noted, with a suppressed smile, the automatic reaction of his vanity to the girl's last little remark. "Love can never tell!" Ah, yes, of course! All the same he wished he knew what the answer to his question really was.

"Oh, I do — I do want to *help* you!" she cried, with sudden eager pressure of her hands to his.

He left her, more determined than before to marry her, much less confident than before that marrying her was reasonable or right.

CHAPTER XXXII

EDWARD went from Eunice to Chancery Lane, interviewed his lawyer acquaintance, got the necessary information from him, then took a cab to his Club, where he lunched with remarkable appetite. It was late, there were very few men in the dining-room, and Edward was glad to be undisturbed. Not that he wanted to think; his mind relapsed on complete inactivity, he hardly, in fact, thought of his food. But he wished to enjoy this vacuity of brain alone. It was an annoyance when he ran into Theocrite Molesworth on leaving the dining-room.

"Well, Raynes, want to rook us again? I've got four dear little deuces lying in wait for you, only give 'em a chance to get in line. What? Come and have a drink on the strength of it. Some of the others are here,—dying for revenge, all of them."

Edward surveyed his interlocutor's pink, well-bred, indeterminately handsome face, he noted the blond sleek hair brushed back from the unpretending forehead; from there downwards to the neat patent leather shoes he took him in. "My dear Molesworth," he said, "never let cigarette ash fall on your waistcoat without flicking it off. I can't bear you to have a flaw anywhere."

"Funny feller!" Molesworth laughed at high pitch. "I've the deuce of a flaw in my pocket after last night, he! he! That's the kind of flaw that troubles me."

"Quite unimportant, though. Doesn't show. But I can't play with you this afternoon. I've got to go down to the country. Just going to have a look at the A.B.C."

Molesworth went into the smoking-room with him, and ordered two liqueurs, while Edward employed himself with the Railway Guide. "Westbeach, Westbeach," he murmured. "Ah, yes, 4.13. Must leave here in about ten minutes. H'm, looks like rain. Do you really believe, Molesworth, that this is the original French green Chartreuse? I don't. They used it all up ages ago. Barbarous thing, kicking those poor old monks out like that."

"Yes. Rotten trick.— Who's the girl at Westbeach, Raynes? Gay old dawg you are, hoppin' off to Westbeach. Always hoppin' about all over the place. Time you gave 'em a rest. Think of your bally old health, think of your poor dear nerves."

"Tell me now. What is your opinion of marriage?"

"Lord help us!" Molesworth stared. "Funny feller!" He sipped his liqueur.

"It isn't a joke. I really want to know."

"Oh, you do, do you? What's the good of my havin' an opinion? My income doesn't run to marriage, hardly allows for —"

"Yes, yes. But suppose it did? Come, you have *some* imagination, haven't you?" Edward pursued his point. He knew Molesworth for a confirmed sentimentalist, revealed as such when he was really drunk, though he tried to keep up a cynical levity about women when he was sober. "Come now, be serious. I've only ten minutes. Just suppose for the moment that you have five thousand a year."

Molesworth finished his liqueur and rang for another.

"Well," he spoke with difficulty, after a pause. "You see, it's something like this. I'm a rotten sort of a feller, really,—not good for much, not clever, or anything of that kind. Drink more than I ought, have nights out now and again.— Look here, you aren't gammoning me, are you,—you aren't —?"

"Good Lord, no. Go on. I want to hear. Honour bright."

"Well, of course, some girls are damn rotten, too. The kind of girls I mess about with are damn rotten. Couldn't marry that kind of girl. Great mistake. For God's sake, Raynes, don't do it. When a girl's rotten, she — well, she goes it to the limit, that's all. The trouble is, the other kind of women are a damn sight too good for me. I know that. So what am I to do, even if I had the cash? Shouldn't feel I was worthy, old chap, shouldn't feel I was worthy. . . ."

Molesworth shook his head solemnly. Edward looked closely at him, and observed an alcoholic

film over his large light-blue eyes. . . . Evidently well set for the sentimental mood, probably been drinking before they met.

"But," Edward replied, "you're just as worthy as most. I think you'd make an excellent husband."

"I'd try. Honest, I'd try. Turn over a new leaf, keep on the straight, play fair, all that sort of thing. Yes —" He raised his eyes; they were eloquent of alcoholic idealism. "Yes: I'm a rotter, but I'd do my best." His saccharine ecstasy in acknowledging himself a rotter was more and more in evidence. Edward had a vision of all the sugar of all Molesworth's drinks filtering to deposit through Molesworth's emotions. "And, mind you, if I had the luck to get the right kind of woman, it'd be worth trying. The kind of woman, I mean, who would give me a leg up. That's what I want,— real good woman to keep me on the straight. Woman,— you understand,— who really is a woman, who — well, hang it, you know what I mean."

"A real genuine womanly woman."

"Yes. That's it. Womanly woman. Clever chap, you are, Raynes. Always knew you were a clever chap. Hit it exactly. Womanly woman. Jus' what I meant."

"And by a womanly woman you mean one who has a great deal of motherly feeling, don't you? A woman who'd have the gentle guiding hand . . .?"

"Yes, that's it." Molesworth's ecstasy quickened. "Gentle guiding hand. 'Xac'ly. That's

what I want. 'Xac'ly what I want. Kind of woman who wouldn't preach; keep you straight without your knowin' it, y' know. Jus' because she's so — because she's so —"

"Good and sweet and pure herself. What?"

"That's it. Damn it all, makes one feel a bit of a fool puttin' it into words, bit of a hypocritical ass. But, hang it, even if one is a bit of a bad egg now and again, that's no reason why one shouldn't — er —"

"Cherish one's ideals. Why not?"

"Right you are. Right you are. Some good in all of us, eh? We may be rotters, but that doesn't say we don't know what's better, does it?"

"'We are all of us in the gutter,'" Edward quoted with high sententious pathos, "'but some of us are looking at the stars.'"

"By Jove, that's fine,—splendid. 'All of us lookin' at the stars'—no, what is it? 'In the gutter, but —' How does it go, eh?"

Edward repeated the quotation. Molesworth was silent for awhile, absorbing the spiritual beauty of the idea.

"Good as a sermon," he said at last. "Wonderful idea. That's the way I often feel. Never could have put it like that, though. Wonderful, the way some chaps —wonderful —'In the gutter, lookin' at the stars.'"

"Looking at one star," Edward gently corrected. "The star of your ideal woman, the woman who

would want you all to herself,— so much to herself that she'd be jealous of your vices. The woman who'd be ready to forgive your lapses in order to strengthen her hold over you, to establish her position of superiority. The moral tyrant, the emotional egotist,— yes, yes, I know."

"Strengthen . . . ready to forgive . . ." murmured Molesworth, who was now lapping up a brandy-and-soda. "Ready to forgive.— Yes, 'swhat we all need, to be forgiven. Forgive us our — hic — treshpasses. That's religion, isn't it? By Jimminy, Raynes,"— he spoke excitedly, struck by an unexpected thought, a thought of flaming originality,— "why, religion and love have a damn lot in common, haven't they? Don't know how to 'xpresh it,— but a feller likes to feel there's some one who'll forgive him, don't he? Likes to feel that everything can be sort of wiped out, eh? "

"Human nature, my dear fellow, human nature."

"That's it. And, y' know,"— Molesworth was rapidly approaching his most communicative stage,— "a chap who knows he's a bad egg, and has the decency to be a bit sick about it, and sort o' wants to blot his book, and be a different sort o' chap,— you understand what I mean,— well, he isn' really such a bad egg after all, is he,— what? It's the feller who's content with bein' a rotter and makes out that it's all right bein' a rotter, he's the real wrong 'un. What do you think? Those blackguards who go on about free love, talk against marriage and the

Church, and all that sort o' thing. They ought to be well flogged, the hounds, the whole lot of 'em. . . ."

"Of course. We can wink at the natural infirmities of sinful doers, but sinful talkers put our moral backs up. Perfectly natural. When we want to relapse on the need of forgiveness, it's simply exasperating of people to go and argue that we've nothing to be forgiven for. Your point of view is eternally popular, Molesworth. All our parsons and most of our novelists would starve if it weren't. It makes everything so beautifully easy; it saves so much trouble for the mind. Delightful!"

"Look here!" Molesworth was as near feeling uneasy as he could be in that stage of intoxication. "You're not one of those beastly cynical fellers, Raynes, now, are you? No good in anything, and all that sort of tosh, eh?"

"Well, I'm going to be married. That doesn't look like cynicism, does it?"

"Goin' to be married! By Jove, though, are you? Congratulate you, old chap,—congratulate you heartily! Good luck! Chin-chin!" He raised his glass. "Goin' to be married! Must have another drink on the strength of it. Well, I'm damned! Never thought you were a marryin' kind of a chap,—don't know why,—but somehow—I say, sorry I rotted you about goin' to Westbeach and girls and all that. Must really 'pologise.

Didn't know, of course.— B. & S.? Is yours a B. & S.?"

Edward nodded. "Never mind," he said. "Of course you couldn't have guessed that I'd taken out a patent of respectability. Going to be married makes a lot of difference, of course. Being actually married makes more. Just look at those fellows over in that corner. You could tell at a glance that McBain and Vickers are married, and Moseley and Greene and the other man bachelors, couldn't you? McBain and Vickers have a sort of wary look, haven't they, as though they'd learnt what to do, and what not to do, what to say, and what not to say,— as though they'd formed the habit of putting everything that crops up into relation with something that is always there?"

"See what you mean.— Yes.— Well, here's luck again." They both raised their glasses. "Kind of a married look,—yes, that's true. Damned good thing for most men, though, marriage,—all the same. Wish I could — If only the right girl came along and I wasn't so beastly hard up,—well, can't be helped."

He drank again, and Edward looked at him, regarding with quickened interest this conventional debauché, with his sentimental aspirations for moral redemption. Edward had a sudden curiosity to see how Eunice would react to Molesworth's type. What would she make of him, how would her pose

adjust itself to that so very representative point of view?

“Ah.” Edward looked at his watch. “Missed my train because I couldn’t tear myself away from you.” He took a telegraph form and began writing a wire to his mother in Westbeach. “Coming back in two or three days. You’re in London more or less indefinitely, aren’t you? Well, I want to introduce you to my fiancée. Don’t forget.”

Molesworth made an anticipated remark, and Edward went.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ON the journey to Westbeach Edward lapsed again to coma. He was exhausted, drained. He found himself regarding his mind as an empty field, a denuded patch of ground, a site laid completely bare. The lavatory door opposite his corner seat was inscribed "Vacant": Edward looked steadily at the word for some minutes. "'Vacant,'" he murmured at last. "'Vacant.' How happily put. Yes, that is exactly it." He saw himself in the mirror: yes, he was pale, for him; he was rather drawn; he was physically drained, too, that was evident. Those lines by his mouth were certainly more deeply cut than usual. He felt as though he had had fever, and his temperature were now rather below normal. The roof of his mouth was cold. He had a curious sensation in his legs, as though the bone had been sharpened.

He leaned back, opened his evening paper, and began to read grotesque irrelevancies about politics. The Irish crisis. . . . Once again he felt an indifferent and jaded wonder that human beings should spend so much of their time and force running round and round about main issues. Everywhere there was energy without insight; that was the key, perhaps, to the stupidities and cruelties of the world.

The further West you were, the more energy, the less insight; the further East, the more insight, the less energy: and superstitions everywhere, even among the wisest. Most destructive of all were the superstitions about women. . . .

He dropped the paper, and his brain automatically formed an image of Eunice, a clear image, ravishing him with its detail. He saw her listening to him, with delicately contracted brows, and eyes troubled under their wavering deep lashes: her mouth was quivering very slightly under some impulse of expectation, her cheeks coloured faintly with an exquisite, uncomprehended shame. Edward followed the virginal lines of her neck till they disappeared towards her imagined breasts: he followed the swaying curves of her long slim figure, he thought of what her slender flanks and epicene knees must be,— sudden in his sight, how candid, how astonishing, and touched by what dreams of ancient ages! He sighed heavily, he desperately desired embraces. Would he ever enjoy them, such embraces as those? Embraces given in his own way, without thought of what would come of them, without thought of possible reactions in direction of loss or gain,— embraces banished, in fact, from that eternal arena of sex conflict, embraces freed from the tyranny of the feminine sex-ego? Impossible, of course. Civilised women could not deal in any passion so clear, so simple, so detached as that. Nor could any woman brought up with the house of bond-

age in full view. Inheritors of that house they all were, intimate on instinct with every chamber, every passage in it. Well, they had their revenge: stupid males paid a larger share of the account than they did, after all.

Edward took out his pipe and cleaned it with spills made from his journal. The effort worried him, he laid the pipe on the seat. The further efforts of filling and lighting were really too much. He closed his eyes, Eunice's image presented itself again, he thought of her as she was, as he would have her be. Why could he not, he reflected angrily, be fooled as lovers always were into that usual emotional coincident view of the ideal and the real? "I'm a rotten lover!" Still,—he swore it,—he would go on: wilful and seeing, he would go on.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IT was about eight o'clock when Edward reached Westbeach. His mother was at the station. Edward was surprised to see her; he had quite forgotten about his mother. Of course, though, she would be at the station; she would never let slip any opportunity of displaying maternal devotion. Edward noted the look of absorption, thickly spread over her face as she stood waiting,—waiting for him, for her “dear boy,” as no doubt she had been saying to herself over and over again for the last twenty minutes. The peculiar grossness of maternal lust struck him suddenly. He had revolted from it before, but it was with an enhanced fastidiousness that he revolted now.

“Well, Mother,” he said aloud, “it was good of you to come to the station.” And to himself: “There is nothing really good in anything you do for me; there is nothing but unintelligent, disgusting self-indulgence.”

She clasped his hand, kissed him, gave him a greedy look. “My dear boy!” she said; and again, “My dear boy!” He had known she would say it. He had known that her eyes would fill with tears. How dreadful it was when people behaved so precisely in accordance with type.

"Why did you take that bag with you?" he asked her. "It must have been awkward to carry, especially as you have an umbrella as well."

"Oh. Yes, I'm afraid — I know it is rather shabby, a poor shabby old thing, but I —"

"The point isn't whether it's shabby or not. I asked why did you take it." Edward could not help speaking with some asperity. These crooked answers always annoyed him. His mother's face took on that patient look he knew so well.

"I took it," she replied gently, with restrained remonstrance, "to bring some letters of yours that came to-day. I thought you might like to have them at once." She unfastened the bag and fumbled in it.

Edward looked away, and raised his stick in signal to a cabman. "Come along, Mother," he said, "there's a cab over there." She held out his letters appealingly: they were tied carefully round with blue ribbon. "I don't want them now," he told her. "Why should I want to read them at the station?"

His mother put back the little packet, with a subdued sigh of disappointment tempered by resignation. Edward was momentarily ashamed of himself. Of course any one would say he had behaved abominably, and certainly he had behaved with extreme rudeness, the kind of rudeness that is only possible in family life. He might at least have taken the letters and put them in his pocket without saying anything, especially as it was the first time he had seen his mother for two or three months. But he

couldn't have done that, he always had found it impossible to treat his mother anyhow except brutally on such occasions as these. Brutality seemed instinctively adopted for self-preservation. Edward knew so exasperatingly well why his mother had tied up those letters, why she had brought them to the station in that cumbrous black bag: it was all done to give herself the luxury of taking petty pains for him. The unintelligence of it, the crude selfishness of it, struck him with especially unpleasing force as he walked with her to the cab. Surely his mother must have known, at this time of day, that attentions of that kind annoyed him by their pointlessness. Did mothers learn nothing? She hadn't, of course, done it deliberately to annoy; she really did think now that she was abused; she enjoyed being abused, she extracted a wretched satisfaction out of being placed in a pathetic situation. Always the appeal! Women would compass that, at whatever cost. Edward sat in the cab, reflecting moodily by his mother's side. "The devoted mother! The undutiful son!" He saw their reflections in the looking-glass.

"Have you had your dinner?" Mrs. Raynes broke the silence.

It was so characteristic, Edward felt, it meant so much, that putting in of the word "your." "*Your* dinner!" She couldn't have said, "Have you had dinner?" as Molesworth, for example, would certainly have put it. No: it had to be *his* dinner, a

dinner jealously consecrated to his use, to the maw of her son. Edward felt that he was messed up with his dinner in a revolting way; he felt as though his nose had been rubbed in it. It was a relief that he hadn't dined. Would Eunice be making inquiries about "your" dinner later on . . .? Impossible! That could never be endured.

"Is any telegraph-office open now?" he asked, instead of answering his mother's question.

"No," she replied, with nervous promptness, "not after eight o'clock. They are never open after eight o'clock.— At least, not on Sundays."

"To-day isn't Sunday."

"And then they open from six to eight. And on Sunday mornings they open up till ten. I mean the main Office does. I think from eight to ten, but I couldn't be quite sure."

She spoke breathlessly; she grew more nervous. Edward remembered that a direct question, unexpectedly put, always scared her. Was it that she suspected some alarming secret motive that had nothing to do with the question at all? Her tone in reply suggested an apprehension of ambushes. Or was it that she was afraid, somehow obliquely, of giving herself away? Anyhow, she always answered like this, again she was true to type: she always answered promptly, more or less unhelpfully, and then trailed off into a mass of irrelevancies and ambiguities.

"But, Mother, it isn't Sunday," Edward repeated,

increasingly enraged with himself for his irritation.

"Not Sunday. Oh, no, of course it isn't Sunday. I didn't mean, Edward, you know I didn't mean that I thought it was Sunday. A week-day, of course; Thursday. But I was afraid I had mixed up the Sunday hours with the week-day ones. I do make mistakes sometimes. I'm afraid I'm getting old," she added appealingly.

That perpetual appeal! Everything resolved itself to that. And wasn't Eunice, Edward reflected, in the same case? Wasn't she always concerned with her appeal to him, never with what he thought or said? Could it be that all women were confined to this one subject of interest, to this thin special egotism? Betty was different, though; Betty was saved by the grossness of her hedonism; if she wanted to appeal it was to get the pleasure that her nature called for. That was quite right. And Betty got what she wanted and was content. Other women would dislike her for that. She had often said that she was unpopular with girls.— Eunice, on the other hand,—but it was useless to criticise Eunice, because he had a powerful desire for her, an increasing desire. With Betty he had reached the end, no further revelation was possible,—there had really never been any revelation except a revelation of type; plenty of other girls could have given that, in almost the same way, with just the same result. Whereas, when he married Eunice, a thousand unexpected things might happen: marriage would di-

vert, surely it would, the energy which now went to enforce that cursed inevitable appeal . . . yes, when she reached the goal to which the appeal was directed . . . but could he be sure what that goal was? Did it exist? Perhaps by this time it had disappeared altogether: perhaps the appeal by now had grown to be permanently an end in itself. . . .

"I hope you aren't vexed about the Post Office, dear," said his mother.

"I'm not vexed because you don't know when they shut. Why should you have to know? What annoys me is that you don't say at once that you don't know. Why do you say so many other things instead? It's a waste of time."

Mrs. Raynes sighed as before. "I'm afraid something must have happened to upset you," she said, very sweetly. The cab stopped at her house, and they got out.

"When does the main Telegraph Office close?" Edward asked the cabman as he paid him.

"Eight o'clock, sir."

"I am so sorry," remarked Edward's mother as they went in. "What a pity it is that you can't send your telegram to-night," she added as he took his gloves off in the hall; and as they walked upstairs together she said that she did so hope the telegram wasn't important. She rubbed it in; she was really malicious in her quiet maternal way.

Edward was silent. "Of course," he thought, "my telegram only affects her in relation to her own

field of play: only as it comes within the sphere of her 'maternal interest,'—that vicarious egotism which makes her want every wish of mine to be gratified, and gratified, if possible, through her, with pains to her. The telegram was a piece in this game of hers that I refused to play, so now she's using it, still as a piece, in her other game of getting even with me." He mused on the difference of the relations between mothers and sons and mothers and daughters, as he washed his hands. On the whole he thought that he preferred the freemasonry and the antagonisms of the common sex.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE gong sounded, Edward went down and found his mother expectant of him in the hall.

"You have something cold for me?" he asked.

"Oh, Edward, we haven't had dinner. Of course we put it off till you came."

"Why should you? And who are 'we'?"

"Your Aunt Amelia is here. Didn't I tell you?"

"Oh, perhaps you did."

"But I don't suppose you trouble to read all my poor old letters."

She gave her familiar sigh. It implied stressed and wilful consciousness of an insignificance which must of course be always ignored, was used to the fate, and in patience and control blamed nobody for it. Edward looked sharply at his mother, and reflected that Christianity did most harm of all to people of her type.

"Well, I'd much rather you had dined at your usual time. I hate having things put off for me. And at any rate you shouldn't have made Aunt Amy wait. Nearly half past eight now, and you generally dine at seven." What irritated Edward was the promotion, by tone, by look, of this putting off of dinner to the rank of a sacrificial act.

Aunt Amelia came downstairs. Edward greeted her with pleasure. He was glad she was there to relieve the tension of an evening with his mother. The aunt was an old maid of nearly sixty, his mother's younger sister, much more robust than she, florid, energetic, heavily built, talkative, cheerful. She had been an Alpine climber, and cherished exuberant sentiments for Switzerland and Tyrol. Two very long engagements had enlivened her maiden years: her first man had disgracefully jilted her in favour of a pretty schoolgirl,—an event which she had accepted with dignity and calm; her second admirer had died of consumption. She was between thirty and forty then, and abandoned with brusque decision all further thoughts of marriage, devoting herself to the Alps with increasing enthusiasm. She also painted landscapes in water-colour, and adhered with vigour and resolution to the tenets of the non-militant Suffragists. Edward could see her character spread out before him like a map, with every bay and promontory clearly marked, unmistakable, permanent.

"You're looking pulled down, Teddy," she said quickly. "I always tell you you don't take enough exercise." She was the only person who called him "Teddy," and his mother resented the abbreviation very much.

"Exercise! I've been playing tennis and going for terrific walks."

"Well, you're looking seedy."

"I don't think so at all," said Mrs. Raynes in an aggrieved tone. "Do let us come to dinner."

"I shall take you for a terrific walk to-morrow morning along by the sea," Aunt Amelia declared when they had settled themselves at the table.

"Perhaps he has some writing to do."

"Writing! What kind of writing, Teddy? Oh, yes, you did try to write a novel or a play or something once, didn't you?"

"He will write something worth reading one of these days, you'll see." Mrs. Raynes was annoyed by her sister's casual tone. "I thought perhaps he had come home to be quiet for his work."

"No, I came home to tell you that I am engaged to be married."

Mrs. Raynes turned pale, and Aunt Amelia's face was the deepest tone of red.

"What!" she exclaimed in a loud voice. "What! How you spring it on us! Well!"

Mrs. Raynes looked at her reprovingly, then fixed a passionate gaze on her son. Her little bright hazel eyes filled with tears and her thin purple lips quivered. "My dear boy!" she faltered. "My dear boy." She laid down her soup-spoon. The maid came back at that moment, and Edward quickly changed the subject.

"You bring back my childhood to me surprisingly vividly, Aunt Amy. You are exactly the same as you were then. I look down and expect to see myself in knickerbockers. How very strange," he went

on, "that I can remember you when you were the age I am now. I don't know that I like that,—altogether."

"I'm quite sure *I* don't like it!" his aunt laughed. "I don't think you're very tactful."

"My dear Amy," said Mrs. Raynes, "we *have* to get older." Her tone implied that it was the Lord's will, and that there was something of an ambiguously finer shade than satisfaction to be derived from that.

"Do you remember," Edward continued his retrospect, "how I used to do gymnastics with your Alpenstock?"

His mother grew restive at the approach of reminiscences that put the aunt in the foreground of Edward's experience. "You're still a young man, Edward. Every one under forty is young." She pointed the observation.

Her son was amused in noticing how, immediately after displaying her preoccupations with her sister, she recaptured that emotional faltering look evoked by the announcement of his engagement. Ingrained habit oscillated in sway with convention enforced for the special occasion. Edward was reminded of an uncle of his whom, as a small boy, he had observed taking snuff in quite his usual manner at his wife's funeral.

"Young!" Edward took a bone from his fish. "Yes, but I want to lie in my bed in the nursery, and watch the shadows from the firelight flickering all

about the room. Do you remember that enormous fender, with its long thin iron rails? Their shadows were terrifying, fascinating: I shall never forget them. No one could forget them.— Flickering shadows from the fire —” His thoughts turned to the Liverpool evening. What would his aunt think of that kind of an escapade? What his mother would think did not interest him.

Mrs. Raynes looked sentimentally at her son. “I remember it all so well.” She lowered her voice. “That little room,—when you were a little, little boy.”

Edward frowned. He could imagine Eunice replying in almost exactly the same way.

“Not such a little room,” Aunt Amelia put in. “It was one of the largest rooms in the house.”

“I remember my grandfather coming in on New Year’s Eve, and waking me up and giving me a new half-crown. ‘Here’s good luck for 1887,’ he said, and I wondered what 1887 might be. It meant nothing whatever to me, except that it was a sort of mystical abracadabra, and appealed to my imagination. You are very like grandfather.” Edward turned to his aunt. “In looks, I mean.”

“So are you,” Aunt Amelia replied.

Mrs. Raynes bridled. “I don’t think so at all,” she said, peevish and on her dignity at the same time. “He is like his father.”

“Well, he enjoys life like his grandfather. He has the same sanguine temperament.”

"I believe, you know," Edward could not resist saying this, "that most people would take you for my mother, Aunt Amy."

"Come, tell us about your engagement," his aunt interrupted hurriedly. The maid had left them again. Edward's mother looked up, in wan devotion, with an attenuated smile.

"Her name is Eunice Dinwiddie," Edward informed them. "An American, living in London. Age, I think, twenty-six or twenty-seven. She is unusually tall, unusually slender, hair rather light-brown, grey-green eyes, complexion rather pale, features that you'd call characteristic, unmistakable, modelling very clear and sharply defined. Tendency to the Greek, but the nose a shade undersize for the rest. However the curves of her cheeks are — well, they are remarkable, — subtle and delicate, — the curves of her neck, too. Her mouth is beyond criticism, neither too small nor too large; really, speaking soberly, it is perfect. And so is her figure. I have never seen any one so graceful and so tall."

"I like the way you describe her." Aunt Amelia had been regarding him closely.

"Oh, I am sure she must be a very sweet girl," his mother said timidly, and Edward's soul blushed. "We must have a long, long talk about her very soon." She looked significantly at him. Again the thrust for Aunt Amy!

But after all this was nothing. Edward remem-

bered how his mother behaved with another aunt, a widow, his father's sister. This lady was apt for intrigues of nagging, she pricked incessantly under cover, she sparred with mean covert claws, yet managed to "keep her end up" as an amiable sweet creature all the time. Edward was sure that her little ways had killed her husband; he could not imagine any man living on with her. But his mother derived actual satisfaction from those encounters, there was no doubt of it. How clearly he recalled their odiousness, and his own disgust! If only elders knew how mercilessly critical children are! As a boy Edward had attended to these recurrent interchanges of female malice, he had noted the methods of female antagonisms, it had been brought home to him that here were unpleasant animals of a race different from his own. Those endless small disputes, the subjects of which were never either clearly defined or of any importance, defined or not; those perpetual wilful, or if not wilful, incredibly unintelligent misunderstandings; that equally perpetual reduction of any matter to the crudest personal level; that exposure of feelings as of boils, that exasperating inability to connect facts or draw conclusions, that damnable reference, at every conceivable point, to some fixed convention. . . . "They are not decent," he said to himself, "women are not *decent*." All the fault of men's selfishness and men's lust, no doubt, but, good Lord! to think that women would be cured by the vote, by "an unimportant reform in an obsolete

political system." Could they be cured? Edward glanced at his mother. "Mrs. William Raynes, eternally damned," he thought.

"You are lost," said Aunt Amelia suddenly. "What are you thinking about?"

Mrs. Raynes looked vexed by a question that she liked to consider tactless and inconsiderate. "We can guess, my dear," she remarked, "where his thoughts are now." She paused wistfully, and sighed.

"Of course you can guess. They are with Abraham Lincoln."

"My dear boy!"

"Abraham Lincoln!" echoed Aunt Amelia. "I haven't thought of him since I was at school."

"The main concern," said Edward solemnly, "is to turn women into decent creatures. If I could do this by giving them all the vote, I would do it. If I could do this by keeping them all without a vote, I would do it. If I could do this by giving some of them the vote and not others, I would also do that. 'But, good Lord,' I hear my friend Jack Welsh saying, 'do you want them to be decent? I don't. A great mistake, my dear friend, a great mistake.' And he may be right,— he may be right."

"But what has all that got to do with Abraham Lincoln?" asked his aunt.

"Oh, nothing much. That was only my silly tomfoolery. I am an unaccountable ass sometimes, Aunt Amy,— generally, in fact. It partly comes of

having been to Cambridge. Oxford men have the art of being frivolous and wise at the same time. We never really attain to that."

Edward's mother was looking at him steadfastly: she seemed rather alarmed. "'Decent!'" she exclaimed. "My dear, I don't know,—I can't think what you mean. I'm sure—well, I mean I hope—You haven't heard about that dreadful girl in your village, Edward, have you?"

"What?" Edward started. "I didn't know there was any dreadful girl at Chesney. How very unobservant I am." He glanced at Aunt Amelia, who went on eating her chicken.

"Oh, yes." His mother flushed with excitement, and began to speak with nervous rapidity. "A really terrible affair, it is. Such respectable people, her father and mother. You know them, of course,—the Weekeses."

"What really! Little Norah—how surprising."

"Oh, she has behaved in the most wicked way. I was very much upset, very indignant. At her age—she can't be much more than seventeen,—a mere child. Such dreadful precocity! And when she had such a good home. I did think, when I was with you last year, that her mother didn't look after her quite carefully enough; perhaps she didn't realise that she was a grown girl. And her father, of course,—a most unpractical man, who never noticed anything. But all that would have put any

nice girl on her honour,— all the more.— Yes, it's quite true what you say, Edward, some girls are not decent. I don't like to say it, of course, but they really aren't. To think of all the shame and wretchedness that abominable little creature has brought on her poor parents, and she's their only daughter; as your dear father said,— I remember it so well his saying this, it was when there was a terrible scandal in the parish, just before you were born,— I remember it so well,— 'It's the unpardonable sin,' he said, 'it's the one unpardonable sin.' He wasn't himself for days and days, it affected him so. He was quite grave and sad, and you've often heard me say how bright he always was, and how fond of his jokes. 'Such a bad example for all the girls and boys in the parish,' he said, and I'm sure this is just the same. It was the Vicar's wife who wrote to me about it; naturally she and Mr. Hewson are very much distressed."

"I wonder Mrs. Hewson should write spreading the scandal abroad, then."

"Yes, a fearful scandal, of course it is that. The worst of all scandals. I answered Mrs. Hewson's letter at once —"

"What exactly has Norah done?" Edward interrupted impatiently.

"I sympathised with her very deeply, of course."

"What, with Norah?"

"Edward! Of course not. With Mrs. Hew-

son." Mrs. Raynes looked vexed, and Edward detected an improper gleam in his aunt's eye. "Poor Mrs. Hewson! It is so trying and so embarrassing for her, and for her husband the Vicar."

"Had he anything to do with it all?"

"Anything to do with it? I don't know what you mean, Edward. He's the spiritual head of the —"

"Well, well.— What was Norah's crime, to be precise?"

"I tried to put everything as tactfully as possible in my letter to Mrs. Hewson. I wished you had been here, Edward, to have helped me. It was only a few days ago that I wrote —"

"Ah. I was probably in Liverpool."

"Of course I could understand her feelings exactly, as she knew, having been a Vicar's wife myself, and having met with the same experience,— I mean, having had the same dreadful disturbance in our own parish. It was a country parish, too, very much the same size as Chesney —"

"Yes, but I'm not interested in Mrs. Hewson and her feelings. I've no doubt she thoroughly enjoyed the excitement and novelty of the affair, but what does that matter?"

"Edward, I can't think how you can take such a distorted view. Poor Mrs. Hewson!"

"But how about poor Norah?"

"She went off with a man, and nobody knows where she is." Aunt Amelia answered him.

"Oh. Well, she may be married. Anyhow, whether she's to be pitied or not depends on the man. Who is he? Does anybody know?"

"Nobody knows," said Mrs. Raynes impressively. "It's so nice-minded of you, Edward," she added, "to think that she may be married, but —"

The maid came back, and the conversation was resumed at dessert. Edward was the first to speak.

"Any of the Chesney residents suspiciously missing?" he asked, and "By Jove," he went on, "it's just occurred to me, *I'm* missing. I wonder if they suspect me. No doubt that was why Mrs. Hewson wrote to you. Had you any uneasy feelings about me, Mother, in that connection?"

"Don't say such things, Edward. Of course I know you're only joking, but you know I'd rather you didn't,—not about anything like this."

"But Norah is a very attractive girl. I'm a human creature, after all. I might have had an infatuation —"

"Oh, Edward! A girl of that class,—and that character,—and in your own village, where we know the Vicar! And you your father's son! No, you could never—you *know* you couldn't.—I won't think of such a dreadful thing."

"But if it had only been my running away with her that made her character bad, I shouldn't have been the one to criticise her. That's obvious. And knowing Vicars doesn't stop infatuations."

“Such a dreadful affair! I told Mrs. Hewson —”

“Well, is any one suspected? Is there ground for suspicion of any particular person?”

“Mrs. Hewson spoke of one of the girl’s father’s men, who had lately been dismissed.” Aunt Amelia was again informative.

“I don’t believe it! I know the fellow she means.”

Mrs. Raynes reverted to expatiations on the Vicarage point of view, the suffering and shame of Norah’s parents, the unpardonableness of Norah. “She’ll find out soon enough,” she said with pious malignity, “what it means to be so wicked. Well, she’ll be a warning to others.” Edward again insisted that Norah’s future depended almost entirely on the man who had taken her, but this standpoint was evidently so foreign and perverse to his mother that he abandoned enlargement upon it. “She *must* end badly, of course she must,” Mrs. Raynes repeated.

“Well, Mother, let’s hope he’ll treat her abominably, so that you may be satisfied.” Edward left it at that, and his mother observed that the man, whoever he was, *must* be a scoundrel.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE depressing influence of his mother's menage attended Edward. After dinner he very soon and rather precipitately escaped from the drawing-room on the plea that he was tired and should go to bed early. He felt he could not bear to wait for the moment when Aunt Amelia would tactfully withdraw so as to leave him to his mother. "And now we are alone together," he could hear his mother's subdued, voracious tone; "now we are *alone*, I know you will tell me all about it." And she would have looked expectantly up, with that "happy in your happiness" expression that he loathed. She might have added: "But I do so wish — I think, Edward dear, you might have told me first,— when we were by ourselves." He could not stomach that kind of thing to-night, so he escaped, leaving Mrs. Raynes on the verge of tears, so bitterly had he cheated her expectant emotions. They were on tiptoe about his private door, these emotions, with upraised, thin, pathetic hands, suitably tremulous; he could see them, petty eavesdroppers, attenuated by female hypocrisies about themselves and everything else.

"They are not decent," Edward repeated to him-

self, as he sat on his bed, "women are not decent. And I'm damned," he went on, "if I take Eunice and expose her to my mother." His mother would be antagonistic to her, of course; was already antagonistic,—easy to tell that from her eyes.—That derogatory tendency of all women towards the conquerors of their sons! And how they redreamed their own animalisms on the occasions that these encounters with daughters-in-law provided, being drawn all the time in another direction by malicious delight that their male should be gratified at the expense of another woman! Was it, Edward wondered, because of this intrusion of malice that he resented the animalism? He thought not, he thought that it was because, in the case contemplated, the animalism would be to some extent, to a quite discreet and conventional extent, stirred towards him. Yes, the idea of that legitimized and covert and sentimentalized incestuous flair was what really repelled.

Edward realised, too, that every emotion of his mother's, every look or remark or movement of hers that revealed or failed to reveal, or disguised or failed to disguise her emotion, would be damnably and expectedly in tone with all those little envioning things that he found at that moment so specially unpardonable. Yes, in tone from the first, and continuing to be in tone; conditioned, in fact, by every familiar detail of his mother's existence. She would bring, he felt, the whole weight of her menage to bear upon his relation to Eunice, and Eunice's re-

lation to him. Edward thought of the way his mother treated her servants, of that constant protrusion of the conventional kindness of mistress to maid, of that constant undercurrent of femininity in self-assertion on either side, in the determination on either side not to be "put upon." They sparred together, his mother and her girls, they were always sparring; yet always under the shadow of the convention of the devoted servant and the considerate lady of the house. His mother established that convention at once, she broke each new maid into it: it was extraordinary how readily these female creatures all lent themselves to being broken in, that way.

Then there were the callers, the people who came to tea, the people who sometimes dropped in in the morning. When Edward thought of his mother and her menage he thought of them. They came into it all, they played their part; they exercised the conventions; his mother dealt with them, and they dealt with her, exactly according to expectation based on everything else that his mother and they were known to do. They were all flying, at every point in their progress, under the same false colours, with the same ends proper to folly and vanity in view, and the same circuitous accepted methods of getting to them. He recalled an observation of Welsh's. So different a person as a drunken old Colonel of his Cambridge acquaintance had made it, too. "But, my dear boy, have you ever heard them,"—the liquorish blue eye

had rolled,—“ have you ever heard them talking — *talking together?* My Lord! ”

How tiresome, to say the least, that all this should go on, that it should flow round and about, and that one's feet must be sopped in it! Edward had a horrible sense of the inevitable mimicry in life: the consciousness that there were all over the world millions upon millions of other menages exactly like his mother's oppressed him, weighted him down. He passionately demanded revolution, at whatever cost.

But he demanded Eunice with equal passion. She might “ let him in for ” dozens and scores of things that he recognised with ruthless certitude as detestable, but still he demanded her. However, he might as well, it seemed, recognise that she was quite as feminine as his mother, that sex made them inalienably alike. Yes, his mother reminded him of Eunice, she had a great deal that was essential in Eunice's ways, he saw in her Eunice's turns and tricks, all tragically aged and bent and creaking. For Mrs. Raynes had in full measure that curious inability, partly wilful, partly instinctive, of women to recognise their own age; she went on seeing herself as a girl, as a romantic figure, delicate and interesting; she had her anticipated touches of coquetry with never a thought that they were misplaced. And, most of all like Eunice, she went full canter for sex appeal when her intelligence failed; bluffed with just that same professional address in evocation of touching irrelevancies, when she didn't understand.

It seemed to Edward that he was positively haunted by Woman: her sex had never presented itself to him as so opaque a thing. He could have rebounded to the cloister or the brothel or anywhere else sufficiently remote from the hearth. But yet he knew he could not, he knew that in either cloister or brothel he would be starved and unhappy. He could understand well enough Jack Welsh's point of view of Ethelle and her kind as being drained of sex, converted to animals neither male nor female; but how was he helped by that when he had no taste for that kind of a creature? There was no bait for him there. No, the only thing he could do was to try to take what was his bait while escaping the closed jaws of the trap.

CHAPTER XXXVII

EDWARD slipped out of the house next morning after breakfast and walked by the beach. The day was sunny and fresh; very soon he began to feel buoyant, reinvigorated. Memories of old buffooneries came to him, memories of Cambridge and skylarkings: he was struck by the sense of Cambridge that the word "skylarking" conveyed, a word so emphatically light-blue as that! If Oliver Cromwell had been at Oxford, he would never have snatched his son-in-law's wig, made as though to throw it in the fire and then sat upon it; or strewed with sticky comfits the seats where the ladies were to sit at his daughter's wedding. Edward was filled with a desire to do something absurd, and at the same time annoyed by the reflection that he would not have thought about it but simply have done it, ten or fifteen years ago. There would have been no reminiscence of Oliver Cromwell then. It occurred to him that he might send fantastic telegrams to Eunice, but what would be the point of that if he realised them as fantastic? And he knew exactly how she would allude to them when they met. She would caress his forehead, gently and timidly, and murmur: "Great *boy* that you are!" He was

horribly sure that this was what she would do, and he was glad that he had not been able to telegraph the night before: "We must never keep house," or "Forget everything you have ever read about being maternal."

Breakfast with his mother and aunt had been quite as trying as he had expected. He had been fretted all the while between Mrs. Raynes's disinclination to permit the starting of any topic of abstract interest, and Aunt Amelia's consciously eager willingness to talk in a thoroughly modern and intelligent way about anything that might come up. When he had asked his mother: "What do you think of marriage?" she had fluttered her eyelids and trembled in romantic embarrassment on her "My dear boy,—think — *think* — of marriage?" the question being obviously as strange and incomprehensible to her as an inquiry concerning her opinion on the shape of the earth: for the orange-shaped earth was there for her, as marriage was, a fact and not a subject for discussion. But Aunt Amelia, when she heard marriage mentioned, shot out at once to take up her position on the little neat mound of her point of view. Marriage, to her, was allied with the Women's Property Act, with Majority and Minority Reports, with arguments for sex equality and the extension of the grounds of divorce, with American experiments, with problems concerning the children, with the opinions of Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. H. G. Wells, with commonsense compromises and the attitude of the

Non-Militant Women's Franchise League, with modern methods for education of girls.

"After all," she had said cheerfully, "it is only the fools that marriage hits hard, as a rule. We must teach our girls. Of course the marriage laws aren't all they should be. I would certainly allow divorce for insanity or serious crime,—but to allow it on mutual consent! We should get into a worse tangle than ever. And some would allow it at the will of one only of the parties! Just imagine what dreadful confusion."

Edward felt profoundly dissatisfied with Aunt Amelia as he walked by the beach. He began to regard her and his mother as counterirritants. What application for his profit could the one make more than the other? This talk of marriage laws! As if laws made any difference! Laws couldn't change the personal relations of women to men, however closely or loosely they might bind married couples together. No, his matter was much further down than all that came to, he was concerned with the inherent incompatibility of males and females as such, an incompatibility of extreme importance in face of the imperious need that would keep bringing the sexes together.

He reflected upon Aunt Amelia's appeal to education, the appeal of the age, an appeal made always by imperfectly educated people. He, too, had thought of education. Perhaps in the long run it might be possible to educate women out of their

mania for creating and cultivating the horrors of domestic and social life. But Edward, especially at that moment, lived for his own near future, not for the future of other people far ahead. Nor had he ever inclined towards membership of that labouring band, striving, so we are told, with eyes fixed on the front of morn, raised to heights above the hills; eager to shed blood that may beat in the hearts of posterity. Edward had always felt that it was the egoists and individualists who were of most use to future generations, that posterity was as a rule merely inconvenienced by the uncomfortable efforts of its grandfather saviours. He objected to the creation of this atmosphere of self-denial as strongly as he objected to Christianity, and he was sure that the existence of the tradition involved would be found insufferable by any posterity that was not insufferable itself. However, Aunt Amelia and her kind, with their professions that sowing for others to reap was the most engaging occupation in the world, were not themselves prone to any form of self-denial: they talked and acted as they did for simple flattery of self-esteem, and because they were at the same time energetic and unemployed. So they were tiresome and insincere, and, confound it, there seemed to be more of them every day, all saying the same things and saying them with even the same intonation.

Edward himself had had casual acquaintance with the itch of his period; he had been lightly impressed

by the imbecilities of social arrangements, lightly occupied with ideas of reform. But he had consistently used his social impressions for his amusement. What had he to do with public affairs?

So now he dismissed impatiently theories of marriage and education, he began to think once more of what he should do under pressure of circumstances seen and felt, of how he could keep Eunice without being stifled by her sex and all its inevitable appanages. He felt absolute confidence in his own power to deal with whatever clumsy obstacles the law might put in his way: the law did not give him a moment's uneasiness; he would have married under strictest Catholic obligation without a qualm. What he did apprehend was the peculiar slave-power of women, the power that worked in the twilight and under cover of ambuscades.

Edward's attention was drawn to a shouting group of children, a girl of about twelve, a couple of little boys, and an older boy of fifteen or sixteen. The little girl was evidently provoking the youth to take her in his arms. She displayed every symptom of childish coquetry, she jumped and darted about round the boy, laughing and panting and crying out, evading while wishing to be caught. At length she was caught, she was lifted up and clutched, and immediately she screamed and kicked. Edward had been sure that she would do that, he had watched her, fascinated by the sense of what must inevitably happen, and when it did happen he was filled with a sick-

ening disgust. It was exactly how this same child would behave in four or five years' time so far as the essence of the thing went. She would provoke, and when her provocation had succeeded, she would react in this same way. Not because she would be too strongly sexed: no, the salvation of women would lie in the strengthening of sex emotion in them, in a strengthening by concentration that would leave it clear and direct and cleanly cut, and give it the energy to expend itself with a decent and economical despatch. But education! What would education do for that child? What essential point would education touch?

It might be, Edward reflected, as the girl's screams subsided with her release, that most men liked this thin ubiquitous sex smearing of their women, that they had in fact demanded and so created it, as fodder for their own wispiest sentiments, as a cheap facile gratification for their superficial sense of contrasts. Well, if so, they paid; they had to suffer nuisance after nuisance till the end of the chapter. Edward felt a sudden grateful appreciation of Betty, and then thought that perhaps after all it was simply that Betty knew how to fool him. But he felt sure that she at twelve years old would not have screamed like that. Yes, girls like Betty gave much less trouble. When he was with her, sex never, as now, *filtered through* to mess up his consciousness. How unfortunate, that other reaction of the Liverpool night! It was puzzling and irritating that Betty

should no longer content him, that he should want Eunice so much more. Would Eunice have screamed? Again he felt impelled to telegraph in inquiry, but she would not understand. He was almost sure, too, that though she might not have screamed she would have done something equivalent. He flushed with agitation. "Marriage," he said to himself; "marriage — Eunice." But he did not say it in a questioning tone. The forces driving him to marriage with Eunice became hourly stronger and surer: that union seemed inexplicably inevitable.

The children had now scrambled into a boat, and the older boy, having taken off his shoes and stockings and rolled up his trousers, began pushing the boat out. In a few moments he was standing nearly thigh-deep in the water, he released his hold, keeping his fingers on the rowlock. The girl at once screamed again, she leaned forward and grasped the youth convulsively round the neck. "All right!" he cried, "hold on if you like." She wriggled and gasped, then suddenly disengaged herself with a frantic push which sent the boat drifting away. She repeated the scream, notifying her success in having established a romantic situation. "Silly little fool!" the boy shouted. "I'm not going to get wet, anyhow." He calmly turned, walked out of the water, and sat down on the beach to watch them. Edward wanted to give him a shilling. "Good boy," he said to himself, "I hope you'll say just that in a few years' time, and keep on saying it.— If only we could

destroy chivalry! Perhaps that is the real remedy."

The boat continued to drift, and the girl, now really alarmed, took an oar. She made an agitated and futile display with it; she splashed herself, she splashed the little boys, who sat sedately, regarding her with wondering eyes; she struck herself sharply across the knuckles, and howled. Then, turning with a tear-stained grimace she shrieked: "Oh, Percy! do come and help!"

Percy called her a fool again. "Put both oars in," he shouted, "and pull them at the same time. You know how to."

At last, after innumerable repeated directions on his part, innumerable misunderstandings and ineptitudes on hers, the boat was brought to shore. The girl alighted with much show of dependence upon her Percy's assistance, got both feet wet in sacrifice to pathos, and sat down on the sand, panting, silent, and apparently subdued. The youth sat a few yards from her, whistling as he dried his feet and put on his stockings. The two little boys ran off to a bathing-machine without sign that they had at all noted the incident.

Edward lit a cigarette and walked away. It surprised him that the more he thought of questions of sex, of characteristics of sex, however perplexedly and discontentedly and apprehensively, the more strongly he was drawn, with a desire that really was sick, towards Eunice.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

EDWARD left Westbeach that same evening. "Poor boy," his mother had said, "you are a little upset,—restless,—a little strange. It is all so new to you. I hope—I do hope—And when will you bring her?" she had asked him.

Edward hesitated; then, "Oh, I will write. I must see her first," he replied. It was easier to reply in that way, so that no familiar fountains should be unsealed.

His mother saw him off; she talked a great deal, and she talked hastily, as though any silence might give cover to unseemly thoughts or observations. Edward was preoccupied, he hardly spoke. "My luggage?" he said, looking round as he got into the train. "Ah, yes, I have no luggage." "My wife—I have no wife." The quotation came to him. "Well," he went on, taking his mother's hand and kissing her cheek, "good-bye. You mustn't wait. No, please don't wait.—Oh, yes, I meant to have told you. You were speaking of giving me more of your money on my marriage. You mustn't do that. It isn't at all necessary. Eunice has money of her own. A fair amount, I believe."

"Oh." Mrs. Raynes was evidently very well pleased. "That is nice. Of course it makes no real difference, and I know you think nothing about it, but . . . oh, and I do so like your not having told me till now! That is so like you!"

"Why? It was only that I didn't happen to think of it."

"Yes, yes," she broke in delightedly, "that is just what I mean! You didn't think of it! Of course, dear, you wouldn't —"

"Yes, but I *have* thought of it. It was only that I didn't happen to think of it when I was talking to you. Of course it makes some difference, Eunice having money of her own. Money makes a difference in marriage as in everything else. But for me it isn't the main point."

"No,—no." Mrs. Raynes dashed at the opening. "Of *course*."

"Simply because I am pretty well off myself. We should have enough if she hadn't a penny.— That's all."

Edward's mother caressed his hand, and was ostentatiously silent. Her satisfaction in her son's money had never failed her. She continued to think of his financial credit as a moral credit, and the prospect of its enhancement was, more than anything else could be, delightful. Yet no one bristled more freely with delicacies concerning money than she: to talk of money openly, without circumlocution, was to her quite as indecent as to talk in the same way of

unborn babes. Oblique and cautious allusions, understanding smiles and hints, were permissible in the one case and the other, and nice people knew, of course, just where to draw the line. Mrs. Raynes was intensely curious about the extent of Eunice's fortune, but she could not possibly put any question to such a point as that, and besides, as she reflected, as Edward could feel her reflecting, her dear unworldly boy would be sure not to know, not to have inquired; he would have deprecated, with his native delicacy, any tentative information. Still,—“a fair amount”—he had said “a fair amount.” After a pause she threw out a line.

“It is very nice, Edward,” she said, “I think it is very nice for a wife to have just enough not to — not, you know, to have to run to her husband for everything.”

“Oh, I don't know,” he replied indifferently, taking her remark as though it were of general application. “She can always have an allowance.”

“Yes, but it's rather better for her not to be quite dependent. . . .”

“I suppose Aunt Amelia has been talking to you,” said Edward. “Well, they're waving the flag. Good-bye. I'll write.”

She pressed his hand with maternal significance, and then drew back, regarding him in a wistful, defenceless way. There she stood on the platform till the train turned a corner. Edward stood uncomfortably in his carriage; he leaned against the

window, after ascertaining that the door was securely closed, and fluttered his fingers feebly at her. He produced a strained smile. When she was out of sight he sank upon the seat, exhausted and relieved. Wondering why relations between mother and son should be so painfully artificial, he took up the serious monthly review which Mrs. Raynes had carefully bought for him, in tribute to his intellectual powers.

CHAPTER XXXIX

WHEN Edward arrived at Jermyn Street he found two letters, one from Welsh and one from Tryers. Welsh began by addressing him as a queer son of Chaos, and told him that he now had need of all his meteoric bolts. "The fat's in the fire!" he wrote. "Reggie has disgorged his poison. I knew it. I know that curved and pointed tongue! I know how those little snake's teeth close and bite. But you will conquer: I fear for you no heel of Achilles. May Hermes and Apollo speed you well! Act — act at once, you who are always triumphant in action. We wait your Cæsarean progress."

There was more. Welsh mentioned Atalanta, Icarus, Iago, Angelo, Caiaphas and others. But all that the letter conveyed was that Tryers, with Mr. Reeves's assistance, had told Eunice of Edward's amours, and that Edward must therefore give a dashing and immediate counterblow of conquest. Welsh had written that morning, from O'Flaherty's.

Tryers' letter was also of that morning. It was short:

"Dear Raynes: I write to apologise to you for my action in speaking to Miss Dinwiddie about your

sexual tendencies. I thought it right to speak, but have since come to the conclusion that I was not justified, and therefore I ask you to accept my apology. Yours sincerely, R. H. Tryers."

"What a cad!" thought Edward. He crumpled the letter up. How incomparably smug, this "frank acknowledgment!" And how stark in indecency was that phrase from Tryers' pen, "sexual tendencies"! It suggested a middle-aged clergyman, with side-whiskers and heavy white chaps, peering round corners on behalf of a Society.

Edward wrote in reply: "I have a distaste for indecent people; so don't write to me or see me again.— Edward Raynes."

There: he had put Tryers out of the way, at any rate. Having dismissed him, he experienced a desire to shock and tease and torment Eunice.

CHAPTER XL

EDWARD woke early the next morning, in immediate exuberant spirits. The sun was bright in his room, an enthusiastic sun, the most enthusiastic, Edward felt, that the world had to show him. He got out of bed at once. He was very much interested, more interested than he had been for months, and his face in the mirror was astonishingly young. It gave him pleasure to reflect that when he had shaved he would look younger still. Yes,—not a grey hair, no thinning at the temples or on the crown of his head, and nothing worse than unobtrusive wrinkles. Still, ten years, five years ago, he would not have noticed that, would not have looked out. “What matter?” he murmured, and went to fill his bath.

Evidently new emotional experiences were good for him, they renewed the senses of his youth. This impact of Eunice was rejuvenating: he liked her for that. Since he had seen her, he had been interested all the time, interested though uncomfortable. Now the interest remained, the discomfort had worn off. Admirable! Edward plunged his head under the water, then plunged his body again, emerged with great rapidity, began drying himself vehemently with

an enveloping rough towel. "I must live," he said aloud. "I must go on living. And she's the fresh earth for me to plant in, she's the sap of my tree!" He entertained himself by foreseeing in Eunice an endless variety of experience; he predicted the growth of infinite fresh shoots and grafts, foreseen and unforeseen. So Tryers thought he could bar his way. Good God, Tryers! That twisted white worm.

In his shirt-sleeves he wrote a telegram to Eunice, asking her to meet him in Kensington Gardens at noon, naming the spot. He did not wish to see her again at that house of her cousins, in that made-up room. The telegram was sent out, Edward breakfasted, and then walked across the Park to the National Gallery. It was still early, he had plenty of time to look at those thirteenth and fourteenth century Italian pictures. He would enjoy those Madonnas with their fastidious hands and enigmatical almond eyes, their look of emaciated yet not haggard corruptness. "Ah," he thought when he got to them, "that was the time. The time before Raphael bounced in, with everything just in the right proportion, with his 'curves of perfect beauty,' his 'grave full wonderful faces,' his compendium of artistic qualities that it does us all so much good to admire." Edward was having a good morning, he had relished his breakfast, the sun was still bright, and, to his particular mood, to his excellent health and excellent spirits, the art of lean religious devo-

tion had a piquant appeal. "Siena would suit me now," he reflected. "Sano di Pietro,— the Lorenzettis. I would go from church to church: how I should enjoy those Crucifixions and Massacres of the Innocents! Of course they should turn those early Italian rooms into churches. Why has nobody thought of that?"

His attention was attracted by a couple of negroes, a man and a woman. They were wandering about on the other side of the room, looking grotesquely out of place. Both were dressed prosperously. The man carried a brown bowler hat in his hand, and wore a neat, well-brushed, light brown suit; the woman had on a bright yellow gown of light material and a yellow hat with a high green feather. Edward took them in, as dressed up to be amusing. He was pleased with them. Their thick-lipped open mouths, their radiant teeth, their wide barbaric nostrils, their pose of extreme gravity and self-importance, their woolly, black, cocked-up heads, the general exaggerated pungency of their appearance, and the protruding incongruity of that appearance in this place, all struck Edward as ludicrous and fantastic in quite a lovely way. Now there was something that those Futurist fellows really might get. Edward interested himself further in reflecting that temperamentally he was against all reform, against emancipation of the lower races, against emancipation of women, against emancipation of the poor, against the abolition of privilege, against the stamping out

of the drink evil and all other evils; against, in fact, democracy and everything that was supposed to go with democracy; while intellectually he was converted at all points to the extreme progressive creed. He left the National Gallery in better spirits than ever, in the lightest, most gaily Sadistic mood imaginable, entirely ripe, he felt, for a delicate tormenting of Eunice's fragile spirit.

After about half an hour in the Gardens he saw her coming towards him, slim as ever, with those same long curves, that same droop of the weighted head. Yes, she had determined to look like a flower, and she had succeeded. She chose her dresses most happily: it was right that she should wear those straight, close frocks, all of a piece, so consciously simple. She was in pale green that morning, with darker green at the neck and round about. Quite right; entirely right. She drew back from him, she moved one hand towards him, very slightly. "Well?" she said, gazing. "Well?" and drew back again.

Edward touched her arm. "Come with me," he said. "And we will tell each other what we really mean."

"Ah, but I — I could never do that. Could you — really?"

"I can tell you what you mean, certainly. You mean to be beautiful, to make the most of your beauty, to give it the right setting. You mean to say the things that will go well with it, to do the

things that will go well. You mean to be harmonious as well as lovely. But you are too much occupied with your intentions, and you are afraid of failure. I am going to change that. You shall fail. I shall see that you do fail; you shan't escape humiliation, I promise you."

"Can a flower fail because the wind breaks its petals?" She flew to cover. Evoking an image of something pathetic and lovely she tried to divert him.

Edward hesitated a moment, uncertain whether to take up her tone,—for the game was pretty, and easy to play,—or whether to go on with the sport of his own flicking finger. Of course, if he could do what he wanted to, if he could flick her into pain and change . . . but would that be ever possible? She would be thinking that he was about a work of salvation, as indeed he might be, but he hated the idea of any such looming of moral issues. Could she ever respond to his intention, could she ever be in it as he wished her to be in it, could she understand the essential importance of what he was to get out of it, understand the close interrelation of the importance to him with the importance to her? He doubted horribly whether she would ever get further than the very Victorian notion that he laboured lovingly to raise and expand her spirit, with the end in view of beautiful vague gains to both of them,—to her through him, to him through her wrought upon and perfected. He saw her drawing in the

sweets of the idea of his "building better than he knew," he saw her playing prettily with tissue conceptions of what she had come to be to him, and through him, and he to her, through her. All the old satin assonances! Whereas the truth was that he aimed at a sport of souls, a sport that had to be cruel as all sports worth their name are, a sport as little as possible shadowed by motive, but coloured provocatively and ambiguously with intimations of all sorts of chance results. A sport entirely in Nature's line. . . .

"Can you understand?" he said aloud. "With your half-educated sophistications?"

Edward looked at her sharply as he spoke. He saw, with a thrill of pleasure, that he had really hurt her. Her eyes filled with tears. Yes, but how far would that reaction go? Not far enough, he feared, for him. But that bowed head! Well, he would wait; in the end, perhaps — For the present it was exciting enough for her, looking as she did, to be his. Her physical attraction would carry him on.

"If you are saved," — he tried to strike the wound a little deeper — "I can't help that. How dreadful to be 'out for' salvation! I must introduce you," he added reflectively, "to my friend Theocrite Molesworth. You can save him. Then you will be absolved forever from saving yourself. Or rather, saving him you'll save yourself, — and all that. The kind of thing we heard so much of the instant we

were out of our nurseries. I am sure you are still a disciple of those Higher Ministrations."

Eunice was silent: she kept her face from him. He touched her hand.

"Ah!" She looked suddenly up with bright eyes. "That wind! — The wind is still so cold,— a wind from a grey sea!" She shivered.

Edward's hand still touched hers. Again he was irresolute, again he asked himself: "Shall I follow the lead? Shall I give her what she expects?" And further: "Can she ever have, in the long run, anything but what she expects? Is she instinctive enough, tragic enough, for the unexpected?" He looked vaguely at her; and beyond; his eyes wandered about those affable green Gardens, hovered upon playing children, chance solitary figures, men and women in their twos and threes. His thoughts began to move rapidly, circling round his indecision, blowing in fitful gusts against his acutely balanced will that quivered like the index of an undetermined scale, suspended out of their grasp, their secure attack. It was Edward's turn to suffer pain. More and more definitely he became afflicted with a sense of the extreme importance of that moment: it was a moment, he felt, that more than any others before or since must decide him in relation to Eunice. This reflection made him extremely uncomfortable: such moments were agitating, they were ridiculous, they were melodramatic, they were altogether insufferable. Welsh might enjoy them: he did not. They

were not in his line, and he resented it strongly that one of their detestable species should be so flagrantly thrust upon him. Yet he could not possibly escape the conclusion that if he spoke to Eunice in her tone, he would never marry her, and that marry her he most surely would, if, then and there, he spoke according to himself. One of his vague glances suddenly comprehended the amazing spectacle of little Norah walking in intimate company with George Forrest. Edward stared, transfixed: he trembled, and Eunice trembled in response.

“The wind kisses the petals that it breaks,” Edward said abruptly. His gaze remained intent on those others; he did not hear her soft reluctant answer.

CHAPTER XLI

NORAH and George came inevitably nearer. Edward was silent. At last George saw him, and crimsoned. Edward waved his hand. Now Norah's eyes met his; she coloured faintly, smiled faintly, was not unpleasantly embarrassed. Edward raised his hat.

"Your friends?" Eunice murmured. George was turning aside.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Edward, "does he want me to shout? Do you mind —?" he appealed to Eunice. "I must intercept them, I really must. It is especially important."

He moved, and Eunice with him, in the direction of the surprising pair. George's back was agitated, he kept a pace unwillingly slow by Norah's side. Norah was sauntering deliberately, as Edward noted with keen satisfaction. How very much the country girl she was, in that white loose dress with its red sash! Evidently George had not yet taken her to a London milliner's. She had put up her hair,—but very recently, you could tell that. Such thick long hair! coiled up with an amateur girlish art that was very appealing. Little Norah—well—They were upon them.

"Now, George," Edward addressed him with a catch of his breath, "my dear George, my dear Norah,— why, we have to *run* after you!"

He shook hands with the girl, who looked brightly at him, without shame, without defiance: they might have met thus on the downs by her father's farm. George's colour was still high: he cleared his throat, and nodded a stiff recognition.

"Mr. and Mrs. George Forrest," remarked Edward, "— Miss Dinwiddie. Mr. and Mrs. Forrest are very near neighbours of mine in Sussex,— very old friends. Such a pity if you hadn't met,— if we hadn't taken this opportunity,— this charmingly unexpected opportunity. But in London,"— he looked at Norah,— "one is always meeting delightful people in London. And so you're on a little jaunt. Well, well,— an admirable idea."

"Yes." George had partly recovered himself. "London very nice just now,— very pleasant; charming weather. Yes. As you say, a little jaunt. Er — we — the fact is —"

"The fact is that you and Norah are going to lunch with us. At once. Instantly. On the nail. Done.— Another engagement. Nonsense. Cut it. Nothing easier. Of course you will. What do you say to —"

Edward was as nearly as possible thrown off his balance. Eunice had swayed and fallen, fallen against him; he found himself hopping absurdly on one leg, with one arm clutched about her back. She

was perfectly pale, she seemed unconscious. "Lady Macbeth's swoon," he was saying automatically to himself, "was it feigned or real?" Some examination paper of his boyhood — But why should this have happened? He lowered the girl's body to the grass, and the echo of some half-forgotten ribald Limerick rang in his ears: "But they found in the grass — they found in the grass —" how did it go?

"Give her air!" George cried excitedly and officially, "give her air!"

"Air?" repeated Edward, puzzled. "She has all the air there is, surely?" Norah stooped down and began unfastening the neck of Eunice's dress.

"It's the sun," George went on. "Water — she needs water. I'll fetch some," and he started off in important haste.

"Water," Edward murmured meditatively, "air, and water, and sun. This is all very elemental."

Two young men had hurried up for participation in the scene, and several other people were straggling behind them, lounging youths and nurse-maids, a handful of children. Edward checked the tide. "No, thank you," he said. "There is nothing to be done, really. The important thing is not to have a crowd. Please tell those people to keep away. Oh, and if you would be so kind as to call a taxi — to that near entrance? Thank you so much." To Norah he said quickly: "Where are you staying?" The younger girl, on her knees by Eunice, her eyes

still intent upon her, gave, shyly, the name of the hotel.

How was it, thought Edward, that he had never realised Norah? One strand of her black hair had come loose, and was lying against her browned neck. As she stooped thus, he could guess at her bare shoulders, at the lines of her bare back. How young she was, beyond all challenge! Amazing that she should not have struck him — not really struck him — before. The half-grown, friendly, simple, country Moll she used to be! Now she was — she was the swing of the Universe, she was the poetic surge of a thousand earth-fires, she was something that transcended individual desires and intents, she forced him into the great Life Mass, she smashed every convolution of his personal brain by that one turn of her wrist,— she was this, she did this, as she knelt there over the tranced Eunice.

Edward trembled. He saw George returning with a child's pail in his hand. He looked again at Norah, who would not look at him. One of her hands was on Eunice's forehead, another on her wrist. What young arms she had, how vigorous with blood like the sap of a young tree, he knew it! She was a heifer, a young colt; she was like earth freshly turned, just warmed by the sun, so as to be both moist and warm, so as to partake of earth and sun. She was immortality for him, the only immortality he could have. And that peculiar laziness that she implied! The laziness of all natural things,

things that have vitality without activity,— so much vitality that no room for activity is left,— vitality that is there in all abundance, is there and stops there, and so creates most surely. And her breast— her breast like Eve's . . . earth freshly turned. . . .

George was nearer. . . . Eunice seemed to stir. Was her colour coming faintly back? Edward thought so. He knelt down by Norah. "I want you," he whispered, in an agony of determination. "You understand. Come to me whenever you can, as soon as you can." He slipped a card into the hand that rested on Eunice's pallid brow. The girl's fingers closed tightly; she did not speak, she did not look up. "Here it is!" George cried, breathless, and Edward, looking at him, was immediately convinced of the gross caddishness, in the general view, of his own conduct. The conviction was bowled full and clear at his intelligence, shot automatically, as it were, from the unconscious hand of dear good George. Edward felt that he had never before entered into the unexceptionable morality of his friend. The fact of George's having yielded to Norah's imperious attraction threw his native morality into the highest relief. Edward was sure that morality had never been so omnipresent to George as since his seduction. George had mobilised his morals; yes, he had called out every possible reserve, and in very happy time, considering what he would have to deal with.

George put his hand into the pail, bent over, and splashed Eunice's forehead. She turned her head, moaned, opened her eyes, shut them again. Edward turned away and regarded George's trousers. The set of those trousers, the way in which they articulated the fact of their appropriation, was sufficient assurance to any girl that their owner would "do the right thing" by her. No mistrust was possible . . . but she could not really want to go on living with them, with him . . . could she? Edward caught a sudden glance from Norah; the girl blushed, frowned, looked away again. What was she thinking? Eunice moaned again, moved her lips, tried to raise her head, let it fall. She was not so pale, but pale still. A policeman appeared in the distance, walking in their direction, followed by several small boys. Edward realised that their group was being surreptitiously stared at.

"Eunice," he said, and bent down to her, putting his hands under her head. "Eunice!"

"Ah — yes," she murmured, "where is this? What have they done to me? Do you know — you?" She looked at him, frightened. "Feigned or real?" he said to himself again.

"You fainted," he explained. "The sun was too hot. If you could stand now — let us see." He lifted her gradually: she rose with no less than her own grace; the curve of her head was beautiful, yes. Edward saw that George admired her. "Now lean on me," he went on; "we will walk very slowly to

that seat. Then we will take a cab. We mustn't be stared at too much." George and Norah followed them; Edward could hear their undertones.

"Who is she?" Eunice whispered, as they approached the seat. "Who is she?"

"My friend George Forrest's wife.— I told you."

"Oh, yes,—you told me.— Send them away." She spoke hurriedly. "Why should we lunch with them? I am not interested."

"Quite right. Of course." Edward soothed her. "A mere country girl, of no particular attraction,—no distinction. Why should we? Forgive this mania of mine for bringing people together. I find it, you see, so difficult to control. You are better now? Really better?"

They sat down. George, coming with Norah up to them,—he had hung back a little, out of delicacy,—made all the correct inquiries. He was solicitous in a thoroughly gentlemanly way. Was there anything he could do? Did Miss Dinwiddie really feel she could walk to the cab? Yes, it was there, waiting.

"Let's go then," said Edward. "Miss Dinwiddie is entirely recovered." He sprang to his feet with decisive alacrity. "Come along, George. Norah, you mustn't look downcast. I can't have your bridal happiness spoiled, even for an hour." He took Eunice's arm, and drew her with him, placing his other hand paternally on Norah's shoulder.

George, though disturbed, had to fall into their line. "Why," Edward continued, "should we give way to impudent Circumstance? A little champagne would do us all good. Courage, my children! Are we downhearted? No! So, come on!" He swept them all forward as to a dancing measure. "Lift up your hearts!" he cried. "We're alive in warm weather! Champagne should always be drunk at midday with the sun shining. The Café Boule,—what do you say to the Café Boule? That was where I left off. 'What do you say to —?' Well, what is there to say? Say? Why, we'll sing,—we'll sing together. Not like the morning stars, not on your life —" He laughed boisterously. "We'll sing wedding-songs of Catullus,—and dozens of our own into the bargain! Dozens of 'em! I've said it. George, you rogue,—my old crony of years gone by,—Norah, you naughty child that I've known since you were half out of your cradle,—don't dare to disobey me! Who's to give you a marriage feast, if not I? Who else? I won't hear one protestation, I —"

"My dear fellow!" George interrupted. Edward had got them up to the door of the taxi.

Norah laughed, said, "Well, I never!", blushed, put her hand over her mouth, hiding her lovely, strong, white teeth. Edward at once lifted — almost lifted — her into the cab. The chauffeur awkwardly relaxed his studied expression of sympathetic gravity.

“Now, my dear!” Edward cried to Eunice, who followed Norah in passive amazement, realising that if she did anything else she would commit herself and fall from artistic grace. “Now, my dear!”

George, still hesitating, whispered to Edward: “I say,—we can’t really; this is most extraordinary.”

“Don’t you see?” Edward’s hushed voice came from between his teeth sibilant and imperative. “It’s the only way. Miss Dinwiddie — really ill unless she’s taken right out of herself — absolute necessity — send her home — be laid up for weeks — nerves — nerves — I have to keep it up — jump in — quick.”

They were all in. “Café Boule!” Edward shouted. Eunice looked at him, with hatred, Edward felt sure, in her heart: but he knew she wanted to marry him more than ever. Flattering, but inconvenient.

CHAPTER XLII

JUST before their lunch Edward found occasion for a private word to Eunice. "Of course," he whispered, "I did mean to hurt you, but not in that way; not as you thought. No, no; not that." She answered him by a swift caught-in sigh, and the occasion was cut short.

It was true, Edward was emphatic to himself, he after all merely wanted his fun, he wanted to put them all together, to play off Eunice's bluff against George's bluff; he wanted to comment on the situation. How could he tell that she would be struck, that way? He couldn't; no, he was not such a cad as that came to. But would George, if he knew, absolve him, would Molesworth? He could imagine well enough Tryers' vindictive censure. Tryers? Not a hint had been given of Tryers' revelations. Edward had meant to touch on that point, how curious that he hadn't. Eunice would wait for his lead there, of course. How angrily George would condemn Tryers! Edward's revolving thoughts threw a sudden light on Molesworth as the central figure in unravelling of present entanglements. In a trice he dashed off to the telephone and summoned him to the rescue. Molesworth was al-

most certain to be at the Club, and he never lunched much before two o'clock.

Edward returned radiant. "Not that table, waiter!" he cried. "Give us a larger one, that one over there in the sun. We are five,—five we shall be. Don't look so astonished, George. The truth is, I hate even numbers. They are unlucky. On an occasion like this we want all the luck there is going. Bring at once, waiter, a Magnum of Pol Roger,—Pol Roger 1905. The hors d'œuvres also at once. Absurd to wait." He turned to Eunice. "I never wait.— A cocktail, George. A real American mixes them here, a man of infinite skill. Eunice, you must drink a cocktail. A patriotic duty — and you, too, Norah, because we don't understand them down at Chesney. Four Martini cocktails, waiter, and if they're out of a bottle I'll never come here again. Never! never!"

He looked at Eunice. It struck him that she was extraordinarily elegant just then. A deliberate elegance; fostered, no doubt, that Norah might feel it. Eunice was still pale, her eyes were bright, her mouth was a little compressed. On guard, she was on guard: determined to speak hardly at all, he could see that. Norah was much taken up with her milieu: she looked about, made little smothered observations here and there to George: "I like this place, don't you?" "Aren't these lovely glasses, such a nice shape?" "What pretty flowers!" "Do you like that dress?" "What lots of people! Do they

come here every day?" Edward's jealousy was acute: if only those smothered observations were for him, if only he could be the confidant of this naïve rustic relish of London things! Could anything be more delicious than treating a country girl to a London jaunt, manipulating her excitements, ordering the developments of each sensational day?

George had by now succeeded in regulating his features to an expression of conviviality. He drank his cocktail with an appearance of gusto. "Our host!" he cried, motioning towards Edward. Eunice and Norah drank with him, Eunice raising herself, leaning on the arm of her chair, with a fastidious reluctant grace that extorted Edward's admiration. How she kept it up, through thick and thin! That fading equivocal movement of her glass towards him. . . . Ah, how she kept it going, with the subtlety bluff, the sensibility bluff, the bluff of exquisite comprehension and unworded pathos, and all that! But what good was "all that" to him? The devil take all subtleties that aren't on intimate terms with the first things! Edward cried out for the sweet brutality of what is nothing more than earth and so nothing less, of what has in it, hidden and unchangeable, the secret of all fixed natural relations, the relations of sun and earth, of moon and sea: the secret of the law by which seasons turn and return. His very individualism, in strong reaction, deepened this craving: if he was to sacrifice to sex, as sacrifice he must, let the oblation be made on a palpable altar,

an altar of clear and positive demand, an altar on which burned no mixed or alien flames. No echo in that shrine of mingled voices in equivocal utterance. No, he would not be made mad that way. He would yield himself to the potent general flux, for a time, and then, having paid the tribute exacted, a tribute as inevitable as that to death, he would revert sustained and calm to the equal clime of his personality. So he would be saved. He would hover midway between individual consciousness and sex no longer: that was Eunice's way, the way of most women, the way into which women tried to lead men, in order to enslave them. No more of that! Yes, this other girl was unfeminine, in our modern sense: there was her inalienable appeal. Edward had always needed an unfeminine woman, but had never before known what it was that he needed, nor why he needed it. Now he understood. Betty had done well for a time, because of the approach she made to his satisfaction; but she had been twisted by town life, and — how unfortunate! — by poverty and toil. She was too badly nourished, too hectic, she had been docked too much. Besides, she had not Norah's eyes or neck or bosom. No, Betty was never a symbolic figure. Norah, grown as now, was perfect: how poetic his immediate response to her! Impossible that she should not answer. . . .

Edward was almost afraid to look at Norah, or to speak to her. He must betray nothing, and he could not trust himself as securely as he wished. Per-

haps he should not have been so direct, even to her alone. That "I want you!" Was that then a false step? — So George had been wiser than he, — or luckier? Yes, of course it was blind good luck, nothing else. George — the discreet, correct, unbending, ethical George! So he, even he, had surrendered to her, she had made him turn his somersault, well enough, in complete circle! No wonder. . . . Proof enough there that Edward was not under illusion. Proof! Absurd to name it!

Thinking, Edward talked, talked much and with some effort, the effort of a man swimming under water. He talked of the wine, the fashions of dress, the charm of London, the charm of Paris. George interposed occasionally such remarks as: "Yes, connoisseurs may talk of claret, but after all there's nothing quite *like* champagne, is there?" "A thoroughly sound wine this, Raynes, eh?" "Not that I objected to the hobble skirt as such, but they overdid it. Don't you think, Miss Dinwiddie, that they overdid it?" "But what I can't stand in Paris is the traffic. Perfectly awful. In the Champs-Élysées it's a regular nightmare. Any number of accidents every day. They really ought to —"

These interpositions of George became more frequent as he began to mellow to the wine: he drank more freely than usual, from embarrassment. Edward, too, drank freely, from excitement. Eunice, on the other hand, drank warily, and rather furtively,

as well brought up American women generally do. Norah at first approached her wine with caution and some mistrust, as though she feared that it might intoxicate her suddenly, without any warning. Finding that this was not so, she grew bolder, she took brave gulps, and exclaimed that, though it tasted funny at first, it really was nicer than cider,—even the best cider. Her young mouth relaxed, her cheeks flushed as from sea-wind. She smiled at George, at Edward,—who dared once to touch glasses with her across the table, saying in a rather tremulous, rather strange and ungauged tone of voice: “We drink to Life!” Then he bit his lips, and found the silent Eunice regarding him with veiled curiosity and disapproval, as though he had committed a *gaucherie*. He probably had.

Norah replied, “All right!” and drained her glass, which she put down with a sense of an entrancing ambient waviness in her brain, a waviness sparkingly projected upon her field of vision. She was no longer afraid of the silent, strange lady who had fainted: the strange lady seemed to have become friendly to her; she came in, now, amiably enough. “We don’t want to die, do we?” said Norah, as Edward refilled her glass.

“We do not,” replied Edward, “and we won’t. It’s in us not to. And, Norah, you —”

He stopped; he felt suddenly frozen by Eunice’s presence. Turning to her he said: “Well, now, we carry the Universe about with us, I appeal to you,

don't we? Aren't we all of us as undying as the grass or the stars?"

"That is beautiful." Eunice answered in a low, melodious, very thoughtful tone. "Yes, and it is true. Change can never kill,—no." She was propitiated.

Edward thought that Norah sent him a smile, but he could not be sure. He began to chatter again, and discovered that George was now mellow enough to be very easily amused.

"What a fellow you are, Raynes!" George shot an affectionate gleam through the pince-nez which had replaced the spectacles he always used to wear. "What a fellow! Always the same: same old sport! Never knew you down in the mouth yet. One lark or another. Always so — what's the word I want? what is it? — 'mercurial,' that's it. Don't you think, Miss Dinwiddie, that our friend here has what you'd call a very mercurial temperament?"

He had indeed.

"Mercury is one of my favourite gods," remarked Edward, as Eunice was responding, according to her use, by an enigmatic look. "You must be right. Yes, I'd rather be Mercury than any of 'em. You flatter me, George. Marriage has taught you how to pay compliments."

George averted his gaze, coyly, and drank more champagne. Norah looked at Edward, puzzled and extraordinarily sweet. "You wouldn't surely," she

seemed to say, "be attacking me, would you?" Edward tingled and melted; he loved her, so he thought, to a desperation infinitely beyond the limits of speech, almost beyond the limits of sensation. "Of course she is mine: but how can I bear it when she comes? I might die then." He was perfectly serious. "Oh, Norah, Norah!" was his refrain that rang.

At this particular ecstatic point for Edward, Molesworth appeared. Edward, for a moment, wondered why, but he hailed him exuberantly none the less. "We've been waiting for this!" he cried, as he half rose and took the young man by the shoulder. Edward made the introductions very vivid, very intense: he might have been presenting Molesworth to landmarks in his life; it was no wonder that Molesworth wondered what was up, and took in some bewilderment the chair reserved for him on Eunice's left. The waiter immediately gave him something to eat and filled his glass.

"Before you drink," said Edward, in a tone of unabated enthusiasm; "before you drink, I give you a toast. 'Our ideal in Womanhood.' The ladies must drink too —"

"What?" said Norah gaily. "To the kind of man we like best?"

"No, no, Norah, that's not the same thing. You can't drink to your ideal in manhood; you know, all of you, in your heart of hearts, you haven't got one. You don't worship ideals.— In fact I'm not sure that you should drink this toast at all. We three

men will drink it. Now. 'Our ideal in Womanhood.' "

As he drank, looking straight in front of him, at a point between George and Norah, Edward reflected that he would have to drink at least another bottle before he could repeat that nauseous phrase without wincing. Still, it had to be done: he must give Molesworth his cue. That engaging sentimentalist was already set for the mood that nurtured him; he was drinking with his humid blue eyes fixed upon the ceiling; the very tilt of his nose betokened aspirations unattained. George gallantly turned to Norah for the toast, and she looked pleased, as Edward by no means did, when he observed her. Was it possible — did she really —? But of course girls liked that kind of attention.

"I'm the most unfortunate feller," said Molesworth sadly, putting down his glass. "Good women,—ideal women,—I— Ah. . . . Don't know how it is. I—"

"My dear old Molesworth!" Edward interrupted him. "That's why I asked you to lunch to-day!"

Molesworth stared at him thoughtfully. He began to remember their last conversation. Was this Miss Dinwiddie Raynes's fiancée? he wondered. Eunice herself quickened her suspecting alertness; she was more than ever on her guard, Edward knew it.

"I want us all," Edward continued, "from this point on to be entirely ourselves. We are none of

us conventional, now, are we? George Forrest, of course, pretends to be, but in his heart he knows he's not." George started and gave Edward a look, as much as to say "How on earth did you find that out?" "As for you, Molesworth, you're the most unconventional man I know." Molesworth nodded gravely. "And no woman ever treats convention except as a sop to be thrown to stupid men,—or morality, either," he added with a vehemence that made them all a little uncomfortable.

"Oh, come now, Raynes," Molesworth protested, "I don't follow you there. What would become of morality without women, eh? Tell me that."

"Or immorality? But don't let's talk of illusions, let's talk of realities. Let's talk of ourselves."

He refilled Molesworth's glass, and Molesworth, after a further draught, turned without hesitation to Eunice, applying himself to her with an intent quite as marked as Edward could have most hopefully expected. To Edward's keen gratification, Molesworth paid homage; he was at once the soiled wayfarer and she the shrine of comfort and counsel, our Lady of Succours. He was just drunk enough! Soon they were talking in undertones,—actually that! — they had made a corner, and Edward heard him say: "You can help me, Miss Dinwiddie, I know you can." She replied: "If I can, I will. We all need help — so much."

Meanwhile Edward was exchanging reminiscences

with George, whose spirits were now high and hearty. Norah, with lids luxuriously weighted, was lazy, indifferent, well lapped in her diffused sensuous flow, happy and sleepy, at ease in pleasant response to her food, her wine and the scene. "Fancy us all like this, up here. Oh, dear, it's different to Chesney!" she said, and things like that.

Edward glowed with satisfaction. Self-congratulation flowed about his veins in a warm current; he was really vain. So much, then, he had done, quite in accordance with his will and prevision: and so much more, much more, he would do! He would use Reggie Tryers. Welsh should be initiated as conspirator, Welsh should lead Tryers on, dazzle Tryers with aspects of Eunice's wealth. Welsh was a born match-maker, and Tryers could be led to pay court, especially if his courtship could be spiced with love of gain and the satisfaction of the revengeful spleen which Edward knew he felt towards him now. Then would come Molesworth's turn. Molesworth extremely disliked Tryers, thought him an outsider, a "real wrong 'un," "a bad man." Edward would confide in Molesworth, excite his indignation by revealing Tryers as the basest of sneaks for his caddish interposition. . . . Then, the finale. Molesworth to the rescue, a Molesworth captivated already by Eunice and animated further by indignant detestation of Tryers. Molesworth, then, from a sense of duty and high devotion, would show Tryers up as he deserved to be shown, and win Eunice for himself in

reward! Eunice would be Mrs. Theocrite Molesworth. How wonderfully appropriate! Why, what else could they do? As soon as one realised that Christian name one was sure they were born for each other.— But would it all work out? A little difficult to manipulate, this scheme, especially towards the end, but Edward would succeed; he had the highest confidence in his powers, succeed he must. And Norah — Norah was of course to be his: but he did not want to make an enemy of George; George was so simple, so companionable, so nice, especially just then. George was good fun; he had always enjoyed amusing himself with George. He must manœuvre in that direction too. George would be won, no doubt, by the prospect of his complete rehabilitation in respectability. Probably no one knew of his escapade as yet; he would very soon be thankful to get off scot free. He would regret: Edward would talk to him and make him regret. . . . If necessary Edward was prepared to use his own infidelity with Norah as a lever to press Eunice to Molesworth's arms, but he rather hoped it would not come to that. If it did, it must come towards the end, not earlier, on no account earlier, or the play with Molesworth would go wrong. Edward had to admit, even in those very sanguine vinous moments, that it was not all quite clear-cut in his mind yet. Still he would contrive, he would watch, he would take his chances one by one with infinite judgment, as they came. All would be well.

See how Eunice and Molesworth were engaging one another: magnificent!

"I have felt that always," she was saying.

"If I could! I do wish that I could. I want to, really honestly I want to. But I seem always to be making — well, you know, making boss-shots at everything that's worth anything." Molesworth's eyes were very wide open, his loose lips quivered.

"We aim," Eunice murmured, "and if we aim, we grow."

"You make me feel — well, you make me feel that I can — can grow. You make me feel — er — that I'm looking at the gutter — er — in the stars. No, not that 'xac'ly. Lookin' at the stars, I mean, of course.— Silly ass.— The fact is, Miss Dinwiddie, you understand jus' what I mean,— wonderful. It's wonderful, really, because I can't express myself,— never could. No brains, y' know, no brains —"

"We can never express our real selves,— can we? If we express them, they are no longer real." She leaned her head upon her hand, and her eyes, as they rested upon him, were full of grave unspoken thoughts. Nothing could be better.

It was Eunice who moved first for departure. She had made her effect upon Molesworth, left that effect at exactly the right point for a first encounter, and it was time to go. She pressed her long white fingers across her brow. "I think I must — but you, you stay. Don't go — for me."

Molesworth started to his feet at once. Edward stood up, and so did George. Norah sat still, regarding them all with a soft puckered smile that seemed perfectly to express her contented acceptance of everything for which she was or might be the medium. She had that look of being favoured and pleased, and yet all the while inevitably aware, a little way back,—that look which one knows in cats by walls on sunned afternoons.

“Of course,” said Edward, “I am going with you. The fresh air—we shall drive in the open. But I am sorry—we are all sorry. No good-byes between us, George. Molesworth, we shall meet to-night or to-morrow. You shall have that revenge of yours. Norah, you’re happy and you always will be.

‘In truth, it is our Norah’s lot,
When Fate speaks frowning, she answers not.’

My own? No, a parody. I was always good at parodies.”

He took Norah’s hand. Her smile was lively for a moment as she thanked him and said: “I have enjoyed myself, Mr. Raynes, I have really!” She and Eunice exchanged faint intimations of farewells; George seemed for a moment inclined to reach for his hat, but was checked by a glance from Norah. Norah preferred to wait.

Molesworth went with Edward and Eunice; he took leave of them at the door of their cab. When

Edward asked if they could give him a lift, he shook his head and replied earnestly: "No, I'll walk. I want to think. A lot to think about; and I can always think better when I walk."

"All right!" Edward sang out. "Don't run into anybody, that's all!"

During the drive they talked little and said nothing. Eunice seemed lost in a blue-grey mist; Edward's mind was distracted by revolutions of alternative devices. When they stood at the gate of her cousins' house, the girl held out her hand.

"We have made a mistake," she said simply. "I came meaning to tell you, but it was — so — so hard to me. I could not speak — not then. I am going to marry Raoul Root. Good-bye."

He bowed, astounded, and when his shattered brain was beginning weakly to react towards an adequate reply, she had glided from him up the steps. The door opened for her; she was gone. As always she had managed well.

CHAPTER XLIII

EDWARD drove on at once to his rooms. Vexation and perturbing doubt kept shooting their fangs through the clogging hide of his stupefaction. He wished he had not drunk so much champagne; if only they had stopped with the Magnum he might have been better able to adjust the matter to himself. A full quart — he must have drunk a full quart. Then there was that cocktail; a cocktail first always made some difference, — some difference, yes. — Yes. — That was why he was always getting so far and no further, and then back again to his mental point of departure. His cheeks were burning and his mouth was dry. Overexcitement: too much champagne. That was it. And then this shock at the end. Why, his brain had been clear enough before, or he thought it had. Perhaps it hadn't really, after all. — Now it refused to move, or when it did move it went in uncomfortable teasing little jerks, like the jerks of a halted motorcar.

The point was — he returned — had Eunice told the truth? It might easily be that seeing what was coming she wanted to save her pride: no doubt she could be engaged to marry Root any day. Ed-

ward's vanity hoped that she had saved her pride. Of course, anyhow, she had spared him a great deal of trouble, but it was trouble that he didn't, he realised, want to be spared. Those pains he was to take, so beautifully prepared for! No, in any event, he had been let down, he could not get out of that,—disconcertingly bumped, as though a rope had broken somewhere; that was what it was like.— Could Tryers possibly have made any difference? But he thought not. And why had she fainted? Was it from chagrin because of his invitation to Norah and George, did his lack of preoccupation with her at that point threaten to blunt the fine edge of the disclosure she was to make to him? Could people faint from chagrin? Or was it merely that she thought the luncheon party would bore her? Or was it, after all, the sun? Who could tell? At any rate, if she had feared that her disclosure would miss fire, fall flat, she was wrong there. He hoped she was not quite sure.

When Edward got to his rooms he found a letter from his Aunt Amelia, a letter posted early that morning from Westbeach, enclosing a cutting from that day's *Morning Post*. "A marriage has been arranged. . . . Miss Eunice Dinwiddie. . . . Mr. Raoul Root. . . ." The usual thing, the incontrovertible, formal, smooth statement! He glanced at the letter. "Your mother . . . *most* distressed. We are *quite* bewildered. I don't know whether to be sorry or *glad*. Please write. It was *really* a

shock . . . so *very* soon. . . . But perhaps only a strange coincidence ! ”

Edward dropped the letter and the cutting into the waste-paper basket, mechanically putting the envelope into his pocket, because he always used the backs of envelopes for making notes. He collapsed in his largest armchair, and fell sound asleep. He did not wake till past midnight, and his first thought then was that he wanted a cup of tea.

CHAPTER XLIV

THERE was, after all, Edward surmised as he poured the spirit for his lamp, some satisfaction in being completely, perfectly, undeniably, a proved buffoon. Now, at any rate, he knew where he was. And hadn't he, at last he questioned, played the buffoon at every step, with companionship, with love, with art, with intellectual toys, with sensual toys, with every kind of conduct and of thought? That grinning mask was inevitable for him; he could do nothing, think nothing, that did not instantaneously take it on. Existence thus conditioned had seemed, it is true, affable enough. If only the uncomfortable, the really 'grim conviction wouldn't creep on him now that it was the destiny of buffoons to be broken and thrown on one side. An elderly buffoon! And George was twenty-six. That was it, Edward was leaving his youth, had left it; and elderly buffoons were paid, it seemed, their wages. This explained, no doubt, that queer crisis, that grotesque upheaval, through which he had lately been passing. How long was it since he had met Welsh? — Last Thursday week, — only nine days: very appropriate, a nine days' wonder. That would appeal to Welsh. — So it was Welsh who had jerked him out of the eighteenth century! — That

desperate instinctive effort to escape from the circus ring before it was too late! And all that had happened was that he had been more uproariously the clown than ever, a clown with eyes even more closely bandaged than before, playing his Blind Man's Buff among the ladies! He had been so serious a matter to himself, too, these last few days, grave-faced very often on the brink of new discoveries, pinning high hopes on his advancing Ego, his "Ego and its own,"—"Myself and my tail," as Welsh had paraphrased that celebrated title.— And all the while he had been, in his holy simplicity, busied with an unconscious reversion, by new circuit, to his type. He had hopped and jumped to leap out of the ring, for evasion of his unfriendly future, but he had cut his capers with an elastic cord round his belly, to pull him back, all the while. So now here he was plump once more on the old, indubitable, familiar, native sanded patch!

He poured out his tea. Perhaps buffoons were genuinely tragic figures. One might hope so, at any rate. That would be something. He remembered Watteau's Gilles, but then he was not in the least like Gilles. Damn it, was he perfectly a buffoon, after all? No, he was a buffoon without real abandon, and it was with abandon that a buffoon's tragedy must be involved. Edward blamed that definitely middle-class strain that was infused with his blood. Still, buffoonery, of a sort, had made him, buffoonery might save him. There was no reason why some

sort of a buffoon should not be some sort of a philosopher.

“Buffoonery has made,
Buffoonery may save,
Edward Raynes.”

He would write verses,— real verses with rhyme and rhythm. He would show them to Jack Welsh. Jack was a critic,— a prince of critics. He had told Edward so himself, and if Edward reminded him he would not blush. Yes, Edward wanted to write, he was almost compelled to write, at this hour of revelation. “I am a buffoon,” he said aloud, “an indifferent buffoon, but I know my master, and, by the Lord, I work or sport for him with some intelligence. I’m paid, but I’ll know something about my bill and my wages.”

He drank many cups of tea, smoked many cigarettes, and by about three o’clock had written two verses, in fair characters:

“The wheel goes round, and loves most dear
Are mocked by loves that follow after:
While sere grows green as green grows sere,
Joy, sorrow, turn to monstrous laughter.
And so, my friend, we tumble and twist,
And the mills of God take in the grist.

“Then, Comic Irony debonair!
Go smiling on, nor yet relent:
Keep still your unabated flair
For chance and change of sentiment.
What capers cuts our grave Romance
One side and t’other of Circumstance!”

Perhaps the lines would do for Mrs. O'Malley's paper. How unpardonable! That he had completely forgotten his promise to write an account of "*Qu' est-ce que c'est que l'art?*" Never mind. He would send those verses instead. He would send them to Eunice — splendid idea! Why really, when you thought of it, they might have been written for Eunice, and of course they were written on her account. Also on Norah's: no matter, let Eunice make what she liked of them. Edward folded the fair copy, took a sheet of notepaper and wrote: "Would this do for Mrs. O'Malley? Send it to her if you think it would." After he had written Eunice's name and address, and sealed the envelope, he felt suddenly exhausted. "Creative effort," he murmured, tapping his forehead, "creative effort." Catching sight of a photograph of his father he speculated for a moment upon heredity. He could imagine his father alluding humorously to "creative effort," and tapping his forehead, just after having written a sermon or a paragraph for the *Parish Magazine*. Yes, but he wasn't all his father's, not by a long chalk, and it was just there that Comic Irony stepped along, "Comic Irony debonair." Those verses,—second-rate verses, third-rate perhaps, but not written with his father's pen.

He stretched himself in his chair and yawned.—Eunice! He thought of that interview at her cousins'. What an actress! There he had indeed

been right. Lord have mercy, to think of that schemed toil of his,—Molesworth, Tryers, Welsh the fellow-conspirator, George even, perhaps, dragged in somehow,—why, he had been thrilled by the creative joy of the novelist,—damn! — he, Edward, Edward Raynes, Buffoon,—made game of all the time, thorough and thorough! So Eunice had been “playing” him with an unscrupulousness far more uncompromising and comprehensive than his own; very likely she had used him from the first for her own purposes,—of course she had! — just to lead this Raoul Root on and in; partly, too, no doubt, for the sake of experience. And he had never understood her the whole time through, not understood her in the least. Yet when she said to him, that first evening: “Go on,—quickly — beat Raoul,” he might have guessed. At any rate Tryers had ludicrously wasted his endeavours. Tryers had played a farcical part too. Some consolation there, but not much. Edward was quite sure now that Tryers had made no difference whatever. The interview between those two! He could well imagine Eunice’s part in that, how she would have played up, her response, her distress, her appeal, and her inward consciousness of how things really were. What lessons women have to teach men! Lessons indeed! Edward fell asleep again.

CHAPTER XLV

SEVERAL days passed, passed with a curious heavy swiftness for Edward, in contrast with those other crowded ones that had been both light for him and slow. He wrote to his mother: "Yes, it is quite true. I have been jilted," and left her to meditate from that romantically upon his broken heart. She would not be ill-pleased. He remembered that she had tried to persuade him into becoming a chronic invalid at twenty-seven after an attack of jaundice.

Edward went to the Club, gambled, chatted, drank little: he listened to Molesworth's admirations of Eunice. "Too good for me," Molesworth repeated, "much too good. When I think of her, I feel sort of like the dirt beneath her feet, y' know. A woman like that — why, I'm not fit to — to —"

"Tie her garter?"

"Don't talk like that," Molesworth had replied, shocked by Edward's ribaldry. "She's above me, I tell you, above me!"

"She would be," said Edward.

"She's above the lot of us!" Molesworth took no notice. Then they played auction bridge.

There was no word from Norah, but Edward hardly expected that now. That "I want you!"

He remembered. What an ass! His self-esteem and self-confidence kept low. Just then, he felt, it was best for him to remain entirely in the background. When luck was against him, he always staked little.

One morning a week or so after Eunice had done with him he was called on the telephone, and heard a gentle voice, in a rather nervous pitch, inquiring if this were Mr. Edward Raynes. It was Welsh's friend O'Flaherty, who told Edward that Welsh was seriously ill, that he had suffered from frightful dyspepsia for several days, had eaten hardly anything, and then finally collapsed on the platform of the station at Nottingham, in which town he had been giving a lecture. He had been taken to a hospital, and then, as he seemed a little better under treatment, to London to see a specialist, who had pronounced that he had an abscess in his stomach and must be operated on at once. At present he was in a Nursing Home — O'Flaherty gave the address — and he would like to see Mr. Raynes before the operation. Yes, there was danger. Welsh was shockingly run down, but they could not wait to operate. Could Mr. Raynes come at once? That was the best time.

Edward went, mortality weighing upon him as he drove through the familiar streets. Norah had slipped away, he grew old, Welsh was perhaps dying, and with Welsh he could have lived. Yes, he smelt mould. Who was it who had said: "That was the

day when I first realised that I must die " ? Charles Lamb ? or Fitzgerald ? Either of them might have said that. Edward hadn't realised it himself before, his thoughts about death had been very academic, the idea of death had never touched him personally. He remembered that when as a boy he saw his first corpse, the corpse of an aunt, he had cried out : " Take it away ! I *don't* like it ! " He could say that then : now there was no use saying it. Now there was a finger pointing : " At thee I aim it ! " These people in the street, did they know they had to die ? What had happened to some few of last year's passers-by in Regent Street ? to some few more of the passers-by of five years back ? to more yet at ten years' space ? and to more again of the 'nineties, the 'eighties, the 'seventies ? and so it went, so it would always go. There was something incredibly horrible in these recent deaths. People who had slept in modern beds, trod modern carpets, worn modern clothes, sat in modern chairs, used modern water-closets — Edward checked himself ; these thoughts must stop. And after all, time passed. It was only these newly dead, and these Victorian dead, that one could not stand. There were the great men, too, even the modern great. He could think of them without that sickly horror.— Swinburne and Meredith.— Meredith had been cremated, and if you were cremated it was not so bad, even if you weren't great at all. Edward resolved to direct cremation in his Will on the earliest opportunity.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE Nursing Home had a cleanliness that suggested medical treatment, a cheerful look that spoke of spruce nice nurses by laundered sickbeds. Edward thought that if he were ill he would be happier in less hygienic surroundings, not so much designed to brighten people up. He had to wait for a little in the kind of anteroom that could not exist anywhere but in a professed medical establishment, a room in which it seemed that nobody could possibly have ever done anything but wait and turn the pages of magazines, looking at pictures of public men and public occasions, thinking all the while of something else, of this or that, thinking without stir of the brain. Edward was beginning to regard with some impatience the reassuring wallpaper and the polite chairs when he was summoned. "Not more than ten minutes," the nurse told him. "He is very weak."

Welsh was lying on his back, with both his arms stretched, it seemed to abnormal length, outside the counterpane. The sleeves of his nightshirt were made of a white woolly material, very woolly, heavy and thick. He turned his head as Edward entered, and his face had an appearance startingly shrivelled; the skin was tightly drawn about his cheekbones.

He was not pale, he was more red than white, but his colour looked as though it were made up of points densely grouped, points that had been produced by the pricking of the needles of an electric battery. His eyes showed pain, they had that peculiar feminine look that one is struck by in the eyes of hurt men and hurt animals; but sometimes, when he was suffering less, they seemed the eyes of an independent observer who had taken his post for a view, in complete dissociation from the neighbouring physiognomy. His lips were drawn together, there was little blood in them, they looked thin and hardened and blue as with cold.

"Ah. I'm very glad." He spoke in quite his normal voice. "You are really kind to me. They should have let you come in before. I don't know why —"

Welsh stopped and grimaced, but did not turn his head. Edward took his hand for a moment, and then sat down by the bed.

"Remember," he said, "you mustn't talk too much."

"They say so." Welsh raised his head a little with an awkward motion and a shuffling of his whole body. "So they say. But there's nothing in that. They have their little conventions; like us all. Still, science is kind. I wasn't sure of that before, but it is true. Science is kind.— I wanted to see you. You asked me to stay with you, and I like being liked, as you know. Oh, yes, and tell me. Reggie — Reg-

gie's little ways. You know? Curse this pain. My brother Lulu tells me I make the most horrible faces. Do you mind? No, I think it's Oxford men who mind that sort of thing. My cousin Hugh Powys was here, and I saw him looking at the carpet. He's a scholar and a gentleman, and they are very embarrassing, particularly when they're embarrassed. Yes, Cambridge men are different. But about Reggie. No harm done, I hope?"

"None whatever." Edward was emphatic. "What Tryers said hadn't the smallest effect."

"Ah, that's good. That's very good. You are wonderful. No one can touch *you*. Reggie's gone to Australia, thank heaven,—sailed this morning. I didn't see him. I showed extraordinary courage. You must commend me for that. I told them not to let him come. I couldn't really have him about my deathbed; that was too much —"

"But this isn't your deathbed. My dear Jack, I'm sure of it! You mustn't die. It's an absurd thing to say, but really, you know, I can't get on without you. I want you particularly. I —"

"You feel like that! Do you really? I'm monstrously pleased. I am indeed." The sick man was radiant.

"It will be all right," Edward went on. "You'll see."

There was a pause, and then Welsh said: "Whatever happens, it will be all right."

"Of course."

"There is only one philosophy, you know, the philosophy of resignation.— I should like, though, to have seen this great war. I should like to have lived through that. However, there are many enough who won't. I shall die with the dead of the first battlefields. You know that we shall be in it at midnight? At midnight! The ultimatum to Germany. And my operation is for ten o'clock to-morrow morning. How exciting! How tantalising! You see how Fate plays with me. There is some nonsense about my not seeing to-morrow's paper. But my little brother Lulu will knock that on the head. He will tell me the news; he understands. Imagine it,—cheating me of my last thrill! The cruelty of that!" His eyes gleamed.

"How public-spirited you are!" Edward was rather surprised. It struck him that Welsh was so arbitrary about his sensations that perhaps he had really ceased to feel anything. "I've hardly thought of the war," Edward went on. "I confess that all that business seems irrelevant. Of course the Chancelleries of Europe ought to be exterminated. But —"

"Ah, that's like you, that's like you! You individualists — your serene detachments, your uninvaded preoccupations! Curse this pain. I'm of another mould: I'm swept with the tides — off my feet. I want to be in the surge and swell of any large general movement. Yes, I should like to go to Paris and join some Foreign Legion of extraor-

dinary adventurers,—Spaniards, Italians, Americans,—a Foreign Legion that would accept any one, without question, without form.— I don't think I could stand our English officers, but the war may civilise even them. I tell you, it is exciting! A war of ideas! The old great Latin ideals and this new Teutonic notion of an efficient World-State-Machine. Which is to fall? And then of course, there's the movement of the Slavs westward —"

Edward rose and touched his friend's hand. He wanted to say: "Ah, but surely you don't think that ideas can fight like duellists, to kill or die?" But he said instead: "I must go. I'm not allowed to stay longer." He was indeed blaming himself already; he should have stopped Jack before, he should not have let him waste his strength. "And," he added, "you will live. You will live when the war is dead."

Welsh surveyed him searchingly. "Good-bye," he said, and took his hand. "Oh, and don't forget, Reggie's boat may be intercepted by a German armed cruiser. Think of that! I expect he's a bit nervous. Would they make him a prisoner of war? Dear me! If I could hear of that, I should die laughing,— although I never laugh. Isn't that extraordinary? I can never laugh, I can never cry."

He sank back, exhausted; his features relaxed. To Edward he had a look of nobility then, a look that was grave and fine. He should have been a genius, was a genius, perhaps. What was it, though,

that had failed him? Something — some interfusion of substance that he had just missed — another of Nature's tricks? If Edward told him now that he was a genius, he would be flattered, he would be pleased at once and spoilt at once; yes, Edward would see him losing the soul he ought to have. What a pity! Edward figured Welsh kicking out absurdly, like an undisciplined colt. But for all that Welsh was not a buffoon, except to the outer view. Edward was more sure of that than ever. Well, he must go. He wanted to remember Jack Welsh as he was then; he looked at him once more, and then left without further word. He felt very small.

CHAPTER XLVII

A LETTER from George arrived the next morning, written from somewhere on the Suffolk coast. Edward's eye fell first on the last page: "Norah wishes to be very kindly remembered to you, and I am, yours as always, George Forrest." So she was still with him, and they had left London. Those grave, tender, savage embraces of hers that Edward had dreamed of, embraces so profoundly charged, they would never come,—neither from her nor from any one else. He despaired of them: he had known them once,—but had he? had he had them as he thought of them now? In any case, it was sure that he would not have them again. And Jack Welsh, whose friendship might have reconciled him to middle age, might — would — have coloured fresh vistas for him and kept him going,—Jack Welsh was dying, would be dead in an hour perhaps, or in half an hour.

Edward read the letter. George was much occupied with the war, spoke of the British ultimatum to Germany: "our only possible course in honour." George rose sometimes almost to the level of a leading article or a speech in the House of Commons. He said all the usual things applicable to that particular national crisis, and finally revived Edward's

listless attention by announcing that he was to be married to Norah as soon as possible. Edward was convinced that this decision was closely connected with the war. In some undefined way George felt that because England was going to war he must no longer lead an immoral life. That was like George. A little later on he would volunteer, join the Officers' Training Corps or something of that sort. There would be great clamour for men. Molesworth would certainly volunteer, by way of "atonement." "I thought, and think, their sins atoned." Many would enlist for Molesworth's reason. Others would join the forces to escape the horrors of domestic life, others would join from love of adventure and the gambling spirit, others from emulation, others from cowardice, very few primarily from patriotism.

Edward felt a certain disposition to enlist himself. Would that be for him the final buffoonery? He had always been drawn to the French and the Russians: for the Germans he had always had a marked distaste. This was to him the only possible reason for fighting them. Public reasons did not touch Edward at all; he could not see that they mattered either to him or to most, that they were of moment to any but a handful of political and diplomatic specialists. If the Germans were pleasant people, let them win; but they were not pleasant people. On the whole there seemed a great deal to be said for joining the Army with George; Edward was diverted by the

idea of George and himself as brothers-in-arms. And death on the field was less repugnant to him than death in a bedroom. He would escape burial in a prepared graveyard disgustingly thumbed and fingered by parsons and craped relatives. He would escape his separate mound, his especial funeral. There would be no undertaker, no tombstone, no coffin, no ceremony, no funereal fuss. He would probably be just thrown with others into a generous common ditch, and there he and they would lie unstraitened, in French earth. It would be almost like giving him his place at once among the dead of long past centuries, to fall so and so to be buried.

He took up his paper and saw that England had indeed been at war with Germany since eleven o'clock of the night before. . . . Edward recalled those fine Watteaus in Paris, in London and in Berlin. He hoped that nothing would happen to them. . . . He thought of Welsh hearing the news from his brother Lulu, perhaps reading the same paper, the last paper he would ever read. How much Welsh would make of that: "The last, my friend, the last! I shall never read another!" He would say that eagerly, greedily, in gross lust for the sensation of it. The date of the paper, he would look at that, he would make much of that too. How much he always made of everything! And he would say: "I die as England declares war! I fall as England rises!" None the less — all the more for all this,

perhaps,—Edward needed him; yes, all the more for his foibles and follies.

Edward looked at George's letter again. Did George realise Norah at all? he wondered: could George understand at all what it was that she held, held always, so potently, in reserve? Could he read her looks, did he know why she was lazy and shy in just that way? If George even had some hint of it all, Edward felt he could forgive him for his fortune, could even get some satisfaction from the situation. . . . George was twenty-six. Edward could not get any satisfaction from that. Twenty-six! That accounted for a great deal.

Other quite different and quite unlooked-for reflections came to Edward at this point with startling rapidity. This immortality that he had believed he could snatch at and seize from Norah? Wasn't that idea sheer sophistry rooted in cowardice, after all? What Norah stood for, with singular completeness, was the trapping of human beings for one end, apart from their individual desires or intents. Why should Edward accept that trapping as inevitable, for him? He had thought that if he were to sacrifice to this precious "Whole," as they called it, he would in a way go free, be free to return to himself. Now he suspected that this idea was the merest illusion, an illusion pressed with archaic craft into the service of the treachery of the Universe. "Here is the only immortality you can have!" was an allure to seduce him from himself, and the bravest answer was:

"Well, then, I reject it! I reject an immortality shared with every beast of the field." Really, a sticky adhesion could not be always expected of all creation. Edward vowed himself to perpetual mistrust of the delusive peace to be won from a woman who was an instrument of the Universe and absorbed by being an instrument. No, peace was elsewhere, the escape from the discomforts and indignities of a buffoonery worn and faded was elsewhere: he would see that. There came suddenly and surprisingly back to him a memory of a dawn he had once seen after a night journey in France; a dawn misty-blue and occult, a dawn that did not creep, but came up out of the east on slow wings. He saw again those flat French pastures, their straight trees. . . .

Ten o'clock struck. Edward looked at his clock; it was slow, he knew. They must have begun the operation. Perhaps even now. . . .

He found his hat, lit a cigarette carefully, and started out for the Nursing Home.

CHAPTER XLVIII

AS the front door opened to him, Edward noticed that at the end of the hall the door of the waiting-room was open, and that a youngish man with light hair was standing stooped over the table, writing. At that moment a nurse came briskly down the stairs, with a look of professional preoccupation. Edward stepped forward and made his inquiry of her. She stopped, looked sharply at him, seemed put out, and then glanced over her shoulder. "Doctor Marsh!" she called, in a tentative moderated tone. The blond man turned. Edward went to him, and the nurse followed. "This gentleman wants to know about Mr. Welsh," she said hurriedly, and went off.

The doctor surveyed Edward remotely for a moment; he cleared his throat. Edward noticed how well-groomed he was, how non-committal, how self-contained, how immune from lapses or breaches or breaks. His eyes seemed guarded, now and forever, and when he spoke Edward felt that his reserved, balanced, considerate voice might have been made up to prescription by a practised hand.

"I am very sorry to have to tell you that Mr. Welsh died under the operation." Edward bowed. He had been entirely convinced that it was so, from

the time he reached that front door. "Sir Wilfrid had very little hope from the first. You may be assured that the end was quite inevitable. He could not possibly have been in better hands. You know Sir Wilfrid Horsbrough's reputation for the very highest surgical skill. You may feel that no one could have saved him when Sir Wilfrid failed. The abscess was particularly dangerously placed."

"Yes," said Edward. "Thank you. Thank you very much."

He left, and walked towards his rooms, through the stirred London streets, past shouting newsboys and preoccupied men and women not quite at ease under the new imposition upon their London calm. So England was at war, and the war was to be the greatest in history. George's words, and probably true enough. Russia, Germany, Austria, France,—and now England. . . .

"Hulloa, dear fellow!" the voice of Foxy Fenton swished Edward with neat aim. "Where are you off to? What d'you think of the war? Won't last long, though. Two or three months perhaps. Not beyond Christmas. Had a long talk with old Slaughden—military specialist and all that—in with all the big people at the War Office—he told me it couldn't possibly last. Oh, no, the Germans are done in, simply done in. Of course they know it now.—But I'm hit,—devil of a nuisance. Rogers has backed out, won't publish my 'Little Fishes,'—because of the war, he says. What non-

sense! No use my telling him; that wouldn't make any difference. Obstinate old elephant. Agreement practically fixed up, but I can't get at him legally; he knows that. Deuce of a mess for me! Lose a cool hundred, at least."

Edward saved time by handing him a sovereign.

"Hello! what? Oh, very nice of you, Raynes, very nice. I'll send you a cheque. Unconscionable ass, that fellow Rogers. Never mind. What a circus, that show the other night! What a circus! Distinguished looking man, though, that friend of yours. You must introduce me some time."

"H'm — yes — he's dead." Edward's accuracy and buffoonery worked mechanically together for this half-audible response.

"Well, so long, old chap. I'm off to meet a man at Madame Tussaud's! Madame Tussaud's!" Fenton gave his usual chuckle, waved gaily, and went, looking extremely prosperous.

"The other night!" Edward tried to believe it. . . . Fenton's existence was inexplicable to him. . . . Still the newsboys shouted, men and women went talking gravely, they hurried, they strode by, looking responsible and important, conscious of their added dignity through the event. But across Edward's brain certain images quite unconnected with that new tremendous clash passed and repassed: while the same words, in the dead man's voice, sounded with beating repetition in his ears: "Whatever happens, it will be all right." "There

is only one philosophy, the philosophy of resignation."

Edward, as he stepped on, looking through and beyond all that present whirl and stir, was at this especial moment not striving to pierce nor curious to guess what lay before him. Birth does not give clear sight. He saw nothing, not even the poplars of France under a misty dawn.

The End

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